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SERMONS.

GLASSBORO, BROCKENBURY, 1815.

THE REV. CHARLES DEAN.

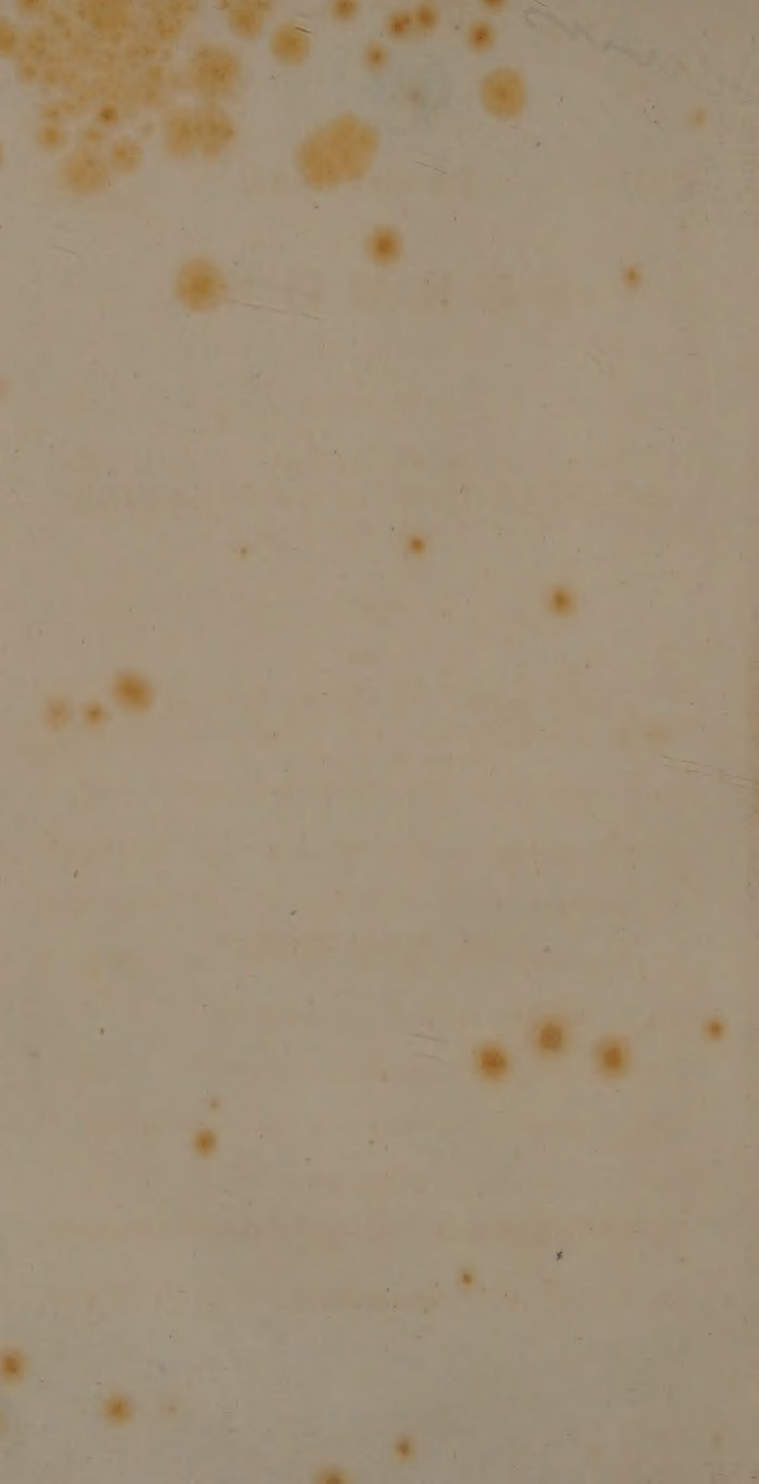
THE THIRD EDITION.

LONDON.

WILLIAM B. ELLIOTT, AND (C) FLETCHER, 1815.

1815

WILLIAM B. ELLIOTT



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PAROCHIAL

SERMONS,

PREACHED AT

GLASBURY, BRECKNOCKSHIRE.

BY

THE REV. CHARLES BRADLEY,

VICAR OF GLASBURY.

THE THIRD EDITION.

LONDON :

HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO. PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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DEDICATION.

TO THE HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REV.

HENRY RYDER, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF LICHFIELD AND COVENTRY.

MY LORD,

IF these Sermons strictly corresponded with the title prefixed to them, I should present them to your Lordship with but little diffidence. They might still be without any recommendations to general favour and attention, and their value might still be trifling, but their character would have secured for them your approbation.

Appointed the minister of a country parish, it has been my wish, as well as my duty, to break through trains of thought and modes of expression, which a long residence in a somewhat different

situation had made familiar to me, and to adapt my language and ideas to the congregation of a village church. If I have not succeeded in attaining these objects, my failure has not been the result of indifference, or of a shrinking from effort. I have not delivered to my parishioners sermons which have "cost me nothing;" nor am I conscious of having had any other end in view in the composition of them, than that of expressing the weighty truths they contain, with plainness and force.

My anxiety on this point may have been excessive. It may still be derogatory to the greatness of him, without whom simplicity is as powerless as the most adorned rhetoric, and who can make even this humble volume an instrument of unspeakable blessedness to the least cultivated reader into whose hands he may suffer it to fall.

Its appearance before the public in connection with your name, would have been to me, under

any circumstances, a source of no ordinary pleasure, but I must now attach to this distinction a peculiar value, since it affords me an opportunity of openly acknowledging the kindness, which has placed me in the number of those who are indebted for the stations they hold in the church, to your Lordship's unsolicited patronage.

I am, my Lord,

Your most obliged

and obedient Servant,

CHARLES BRADLEY.

Glasbury, Dec. 20, 1826.

By the same Author,

SERMONS, preached in the Parish Church of **HIGH
WYCOMBE**, Bucks. Seventh Edition. Two Volumes.
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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

THE END OF MAN'S EARTHLY HISTORY.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 7.—*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

Page 1.

SERMON II.

THE LABOURERS STANDING IDLE AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

ST. MATTHEW xx. 6.—*About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

Page 19.

SERMON III.

THE BUILDING OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE.

1 KINGS vi. 7.—*The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house, while it was in building.*

Page 39.

SERMON IV.

THE PRAYER OF MOSES FOR A VIEW OF GOD.

EXODUS xxxiii. 18.—*I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.*

Page 59.

SERMON V.

THE TWO BUILDERS.

ST. LUKE vi. 47, 48, 49.—*Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.*

Page 78.

SERMON VI.

THE VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

ZECHARIAH xiv. 6, 7.—*It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark; but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.*

Page 97.

SERMON VII.

THE UNBELIEF OF THE SAMARITAN LORD.

2 KINGS vii. 2.—*Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.*

Page 117.

SERMON VIII.

THE FUNERAL AT THE GATE OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 12.—*Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.*

Page 136.

SERMON IX.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST FOR THE WIDOW OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 13.—*When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.*

Page 153.

SERMON X.

THE WIDOW'S SON RESTORED TO LIFE.

ST. LUKE vii. 14, 15.—*He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him, stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak : and he delivered him to his mother.*

Page 171.

SERMON XI.

SINS REMEMBERED BY GOD.

PSALM xc. 8.—*Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*

Page 190.

SERMON XII.

SINS REMEMBERED BY GOD.

PSALM xc. 8.—*Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*

Page 205.

SERMON XIII.

SINS BLOTTED OUT BY GOD.

ISAIAH xliii. 25.—*I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

Page 225.

SERMON XIV.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PARDONED.

ST. LUKE vii. 37, 38.—*Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

Page 244.

SERMON XV.

THE AFFLICTED DAVID A PARDONED SINNER.

2 SAMUEL xii. 13.—*Nathan said unto David, The Lord also
hath put away thy sin.*

Page 262.

SERMON XVI.

THE MESSAGE SENT TO ST. PAUL IN THE STORM.

ACTS xxvii. 23, 24.—*There stood by me this night the angel of
God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul;
thou must be brought before Cæsar.*

Page 280.

SERMON XVII.

THE FOOLISH VIRGINS.

ST. MATTHEW xxv. 8.—*Our lamps are gone out.*

Page 299.

SERMON XVIII.

THE ROCK AT HOREB.

1 CORINTHIANS x. 4.—*They drank of that spiritual rock that
followed them, and that rock was Christ.*

Page 319.

SERMON XIX.

THE STREAMS FROM THE ROCK AT HOREB.

PSALM lxxviii. 16.—*He brought streams also out of the rock.*

Page 333.

SERMON XX.

THE FLOWING OF THE STREAMS FROM HOREB.

PSALM cv. 41.—*He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out: they ran in the dry places like a river.*

Page 351.

SERMON XXI.

THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD.

PSALM cxlii. 5, 6.—*Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth?*

Page 371.

SERMON XXII.

THE DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TOWARDS THE HEATHEN.

EZEKIEL xxxvii. 4.—*Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.*

Page 390.

SERMON I.

THE END OF MAN'S EARTHLY HISTORY.

ECCLESIASTES xii. 7.

*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was,
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

THUS, brethren, does old age end ; and not old age only—thus will soon end the history of us all. The former part of this chapter may be applicable to very few of us. It exhibits a picture of man in his latter days. It describes him as gradually sinking under the weight of years, and the infirmities of dissolving nature. These we may never experience ; for we may die before “ the evil days ” which bring them, come. But die when we may, this will be the close, the winding up of our earthly history, “ The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

We have here for our consideration, first, the two parts of which we are composed, and, secondly, their different destinations when they are separated.

I. What is man? Have you ever asked yourselves this question, brethren? If you have seriously done so, it has perplexed and bewildered you. We know not what we are. All that we can learn about ourselves, is no more than the simple fact with which every child is acquainted, that we are made up of a body and a soul; that we are composed of two very different parts, which became connected we know not when, and affect one another we know not how. They are called in the text "the dust" and "the spirit." These two united form that common, but most mysterious piece of workmanship, which we call man.

1. By *the dust* we are undoubtedly to understand the body, that part of us which may be seen and felt.

But why is the body called by this humiliating name? Partly on account of *its origin*. "Of the dust of the ground" did the Lord God form man. He could have formed him without this dust, without any materials whatsoever; but to keep him low, to mortify the pride of his vain descendants, he took the meanest substance that the earth could furnish, and moulded that into the

shape of man. Hence we are said to dwell "in houses of clay;" the habitation of our spirit is called "an earthly house;" its "foundation is in the dust," and of dust are its walls composed.

This expression may refer also to *the perishable nature* of our bodies. They are not formed of materials that are strong and lasting, of brass, or iron, or stone. Then we might have defied the hand of violence and of time. But we are dust, one of the lightest, the most unstable of all earthly substances. One moment, it lies before us in our path; the next, a breath of wind removes it, and scatters it at its will.

And what are we, but creatures born to perish? so liable to frailty and to change, that we are said to be "made subject" to vanity? Vanity has a dominion over us, and we are every moment feeling its power. Nay, we are vanity itself, and that, not in our worst condition only, amidst the ravages of disease and the weakness of age; no; in our "best estate" we are "altogether vanity." A wind passes over us, and we are gone. Hence Job connects our frailty with our earthly origin. No sooner has he spoken of our "houses of clay," than he says of us, "They are crushed before the moth. They are destroyed from morning to evening. They perish for ever without any regarding it."

But there is one idea more comprehended under

this term—*meanness*, worthlessness. Nothing is of less value than dust. It is rudely trodden on by every foot. It is sometimes removed as a nuisance out of our path.

And what is the worth of these bodies of ours, which we pamper and adorn with so much care? True, they are the workmanship of God, monuments of the omnipotence which could build so wondrous a fabric from materials so vile; but they still are dust, composed of the same elements as the body of the meanest reptile, as a blade of grass. They are of importance to us now, because they are the tabernacles of the immortal soul; but separate them from that soul, take them when the spirit has forsaken them—what is their value then? Our friends will tell;—they will bury us out of their sight. In the very houses which we now call our own, we shall be denied a lodging. Loved or hated, a grave will be dug for us, and we shall be left in it in darkness and alone, valued only by the worm which takes us for its prey.

2. But man is not all dust. “There is a spirit in him.” And it is his own spirit; it forms a part of him. And what is *the spirit*? None but the living God can tell. It is that strange something within us, which no human eye has ever seen, but without which we can do nothing and are nothing, at least, no more than a clod or a stone. It dwells in the body, animates and rules it; but is not

confined to it. Spurning the limits of time and space, it roves among the ages that are gone, as though it had lived in them. By the wings of its powerful imagination, it flies to the remotest parts of the earth, it ranges through the orbs of the sky ; nay, it soars beyond them. Guided by a light sent down from heaven, it rises to the great God himself, penetrates into that invisible eternity which he inhabits, and elevates, and expands, and transforms itself, by contemplating those glories which are at his right hand.

In its nature, it is altogether different from the other part of us. We know not how it was made, but we know that nothing on the earth was employed in the creation of it. It was altogether heavenly in its origin, brought into existence by the immediate act of God. If formed of any materials, they are such as lie far beyond the reach of man's discovery or conception, such as angels were created from, such perhaps as angels cannot comprehend.

It is immortal. The body is of short duration. It soon arrives at its perfection, and soon decays : it may speedily be worn out. But the soul never dies. It may change ; it may be enfeebled, or polluted, or degraded ; but it cannot be destroyed. Even sin, which has withered all its beauty, cannot put an end to its existence. Corruption and the worm cannot touch it. Amidst all the generations

of time, all the ravages of death, all the vicissitudes of human things, it lives and acts. The wreck of a world can no more injure it, than the fall of a leaf in a distant forest, can wound the eagle that is soaring in the skies.

Is not man then a mysterious being? Look at his body. How "fearfully and wonderfully" is it made! Composed of dust, and yet so contrived and framed, that the wisest of the sons of men cannot learn its structure! He owns himself baffled as he studies it; and the more he studies it, the more is he lost in admiration at the number and variety of its parts. Every limb, every vessel, every movement within it, is an amazing proof, we might almost say, an amazing effort of almighty power and skill.

But this is nothing when compared with the spirit. The one excites our admiration as we think of it; the other will not let us think of it. It is out of our reach. It mocks our efforts.

And then the union that exists between this moulded dust and the immortal spirit—how close is it! To affect the one is, in some degree, to affect the other. And this union is as strange as it is close. What is the tie which connects these two parts of us? They are held together by the breath which is every moment passing to and fro from our nostrils; at least, when that breath ceases to pass, their union ends.

We need not then look around us for wonders. We ourselves are wonders. The youngest child within these walls is enough to confound and humble an enquiring world.

II. But the two parts of which we are composed, though closely united, are not inseparable. A trifle can at any time sever them. Sooner or later, they must be parted. If disease or violence do not rend them asunder, as though weary of their union, they will separate of themselves. Let us then consider, in the second place, *their destinations* when we die.

We must not enter on this consideration, without remembering that we have now before us the most important enquiry which can possibly engage our thoughts. Be we in what state we may, it is certain that we cannot long continue in it. It must soon come to an end. We must undergo a change. And if the question, What will this change be? does not interest us, where is the question that ought to affect us?

1. We are reminded, first, of the change which *our bodies* are destined to undergo. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was;" that is, the body shall become just what it was before the hand of God modelled, and the living soul animated it. It was dust, and it shall turn to dust again. A humiliating and loathsome process

shall mingle it with the clods of the valley, and give it to the winds of heaven.

And must it really come to this? Must the forms that move around us, must the frames of our children and friends, that seem so firm, thus perish? They must. They may be very dear to us; as we look on them, they may appear so lovely and so strong, that we can hardly deem it true that death can harm them; but they will soon be gone, gone as a dream of the night or a shadow of the morning. We ourselves shall follow them. We may go before them. Ere we are aware, weariness and pain may be exchanged for rottenness and dust. Our "time is appointed," our "months are numbered," our "days are determined;" and when they are spent, we shall all lie cold at the root of the rocks, at the foot of the mountains.

But why is this? Why must the body, so curiously and exquisitely wrought, so much loved and cherished, be thus broken in pieces and destroyed? We say, because it is mortal; but how came it mortal? Though but dust, yet it is not therefore of necessity perishable dust. The same Being who wrought it into the shape of man, could as easily preserve it in that shape, as he now destroys it. The power which gave it life, is surely able to sustain it in never-fading vigour.

We often err in this matter. We talk of death

as coming in what we call "the order of nature," and seem to regard it as a thing of course, as a part of the original portion and destination of our race. Thus we endeavour to conceal our shame. But as long as man continued sinless, death had no more power to touch his body, than it has to destroy his soul. He became mortal, when he became sinful. Dust he was ; but it was not till he became rebellious dust, that he heard a voice saying to him, "Unto dust shalt thou return."

When therefore we see the shrouded corpse and the opened grave, it is vain, it is worse than vain, it is deceptive to say, "See there the work of nature." Nature abhors the charge. That havoc is the work of sin. Yes, brethren, the pride, the sensuality, the worldly-mindedness, the self-will, the forgetfulness of God, which we make so light of—these are the things which laid our fathers in the grave, and will soon lay us there. Their vileness, their guilt, their destructive power, are written in the ashes of all the dead, and will soon be written in our own. Such is the scripture account of the matter ; "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, in that all have sinned."

It is in vain that we object to this statement, that we charge this dispensation with severity ; the stubborn fact remains—all that ever lived, have died ; and we, in the midst of our objections,

and cavils, and doubtings, are hastening to the tomb. There is only one conclusion to which a rational enquirer can come ; it is this ; "Sin is a greater evil in the sight of God, than it is in mine. I have yet to learn its malignity. No heart can conceive aright of its terrors."

2. Such is the destination of the body, and such the cause of it. Let us look now at *the destination of the soul*. "The spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Here we are again baffled. Where is God ? How does the spirit find him ? By what strange means does it ascend to his abode ? We may ask these questions, but who can answer them ? Probably the spirit itself could not, even after it has travelled this mysterious journey. It is certain that we, on this side of the grave, know nothing of the matter. We may think and talk about it, we may amuse ourselves and perplex others ; but as for comprehending it, we might as easily scale the heavens. We must end where we began—this is the extent of our knowledge—"The spirit shall return to God."

The Lord Jehovah always claims the spirit as his own. "All souls," says he, "are mine." If they are in a limited sense ours, they are so only because he has given them to us. He was at first "the Father of our spirits," for they came from his hand : he is still their Lord. Hence

when our bodies are about to turn to corruption, he recalls them to himself. He might still confine them in their wretched habitations ; force them to linger among their mouldering ruins, and witness their desolation ; imprison them in a dead, as well as in a living frame : but he spares even the guilty this degradation. The body goes to the dust alone. The liberated spirit spurns the dust. Death beats down its prison walls, and then, like a captive exile, it hastens to be free, and a moment takes it to its native skies.

For mark—the return of the spirit to God is represented here as immediate. It takes place at the very instant when the “ silver cord ” is loosed, and “ the wheel ” of life stopped. Superstition, or vanity, or affection, may for a long time keep the body, at least a part of it, from its destined home ; but the soul—nothing can detain or delay it. God says, “ Return ; ” and ere the word has gone forth from his mouth, he sees it naked and trembling before his throne. This truth should correct an error into which many of us are very prone to fall. We often look on the realities of eternity as very distant from us. We think that between us and the awful scenes we have heard of, many hundred years of insensibility and nothingness will intervene ; that our souls will sleep in some unknown land, till the close of all things. But where have we learned this notion ?

Not from the Bible. There is not a declaration there which can sanction it. On the contrary, there are many passages which go directly against it. "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise," said our Lord to the malefactor who was dying at his side ; and in what state there ? Senseless and lifeless ? No ; alive to its glories, transported with its blessedness. And when Paul thought of being "absent from the body," what did he connect with this absence ? What did he look on as its immediate and necessary consequence ? He knew that he should be "present with the Lord."

O what a solemn thought is this ! Who has not been thrilled by it, as he has heard the breath go forth from some fellow-worm ? And who can resist its power, when he applies it to himself ? Brethren, you are living just as near to eternity, as you are to the grave. The hour of your entering into heaven or being cast into hell, is not one moment farther off than the hour of your own death. If you die to-day, where will to-morrow find your spirit ? Not hovering over its deserted clay ; not mingling unseen with your children and friends, to soothe itself with their sorrow for your loss. No : it will be among eternal joys or eternal sorrows ; far from all the abodes of men ; in the midst of the pardoned and glorified, or among the condemned

and lost. It will be one of these inhabitants of eternity ; taking its share in their wailings, or in their triumphant songs.

Hence we may observe, that it is no light or trifling purpose, for which "the spirit returns to the God who gave it." It goes to him to give an account of all it has thought, and felt, and done, while in the flesh ; of the use it has made of its own powers, and of the powers of that body over which it ruled. He sent it here that it might know, and love, and serve him ; he sends for it again at death, to enquire whether it has fulfilled his work. It goes to him therefore to be judged, to appear at his bar and receive its sentence ; and then to enter on its final home. If found in Christ, clothed in his righteousness and purified by his Spirit, it will dwell in a world where it shall sorrow no more, fear no more, be unsatisfied no more. If found out of Christ, rising from its earthly tenement with the stains of unrepented sin polluting it, and the guilt of unpardoned sin testifying against it, it will be "driven away in its wickedness," to await in darkness, far from the "presence of the Lord and the glory of his power," the judgment of the great day ; a day which will confirm all its fears, increase its anguish, and deepen its despair.

We see then, brethren, that each part of us goes to its own place when we die ; each "returns,"

is restored to its original source. The earth opens its bosom to receive its due, and it does receive it ; earth is given to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The great God claims the spirit. It goes to him ; he takes it, and disposes of it as he will. And in the destination of both he magnifies his own great name. The body, as it perishes, declares his holiness in one world, while the soul, if lost, reveals it in another. If saved, it is saved “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” It shines forth in the heavens, the brightest monument there of his unsearchable love.

This then is the view which this text affords us of our approaching destination. It warrants us in coming to this conclusion—*There are events about to take place in our history of far greater importance to us, than any we have yet experienced.* I speak not, brethren, of the success or failure of our earthly schemes, of changes in our worldly condition or circumstances, of sudden riches or sudden poverty, of the loss of children, or parents, or kindred. I speak of what this text foretells, of the falling into dust of the very bodies which are here assembled, of the departure of your soul and my soul into the presence of its Judge.

And who can tell us what this presence is ? As we think of it, the sinking of the body into dust is forgotten. To appear before the great and

hitherto unseen Jehovah—to see him eye to eye and face to face, who formed the worlds and all that dwell in them—to stand before infinite majesty, and purity, and justice—to be in a world of spirits, and we ourselves also to be spirits—to hear a voice consigning us, and that for ever, to happiness we have never yet been able to conceive of, or to misery that even guilty man, in his wretchedness here, has never known—who is not bewildered at the thought? And yet this very appearance before God we must experience; this bewildering, overwhelming thought we must realize. There is no prospect, no possibility of our escaping it. We shall as surely face our Judge in eternity, as we now behold one another here. And we may be called on to face him in an instant. Our soul is kept from returning to him—by what? by a little dust; by a body so frail, so easily dissolved, and liable to so many dangers, that they who know its structure best, wonder the most that it holds together for an hour.

Brethren, what think you of these things? these certain, and important, and probably near events which are coming on you? Are you prepared for them? Have they occupied your attention, and interested your feelings, and influenced your conduct? Have they made the gospel most welcome to you, the Saviour very precious, the world a thing of nought? If not,

what can we say to you? What does conscience say? "Thou fool!"

There is something awful in the prospect of eternity even to the man who has been all his life long preparing to enter it, and who knows that, in any world or in any state, he is safe in Christ. This very day, as he has thought of it, he has prayed, if not trembled. And yet you, unprepared, unready, are at ease. There is something far more appalling in this unconcern, than in any scene which an open grave could shew. That is the triumph of sin over a heap of dust; this is its triumph over an immortal spirit. And if this victory be so dreadful here, in a world of mercy, judge for yourselves, what will it be in a world of wrath? O that you may seek of the living God a heart to fear its terrors!

But what is the language of this text to *the faithful servants of Christ*? It says to them, be serious, be sober, be in earnest. Sit loose to the world. Think much of death. Look for it. Be every hour prepared to meet your God. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."

But this is not all. Though it does not speak expressly the language of consolation, yet it reminds us of many things that ought to cheer you.

True, the dust must "return to the earth as it was;" and we may be well content to let it go there. Our Bibles tell us that "it is a vile body," a body of humiliation; and such we have found it. Its weakness and disease have often chilled, and fettered, and clogged our souls; and what have its lusts, its vile affections done? They have forced us to hate ourselves; they have made us weep and groan. And shall we repine at the prospect of escaping from such a body as this? O no, not if we were never to see it again. But we shall see it again, and dwell in it again. To the earth it must go, and lie there for a time in dishonour and ruin: but what says the scripture? "This corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality." In some mysterious manner, these frames of ours which death shall break down and worms destroy, and winds scatter—these very bodies shall be raised, shall live again, as really and as vigorously as they are living and moving now. The overthrown and polluted tenement shall be rebuilt; but no more an earthly tabernacle. No dust shall form it. It shall rise a pure and spiritual mansion, fashioned after the similitude of that glorious temple, in which the Son of man himself dwells and reigns.

As for your spirit, it will "return unto God, who gave it." Before your body is in its grave,

your soul shall be in the bosom of its Lord, in the heaven of his glory. This shall be its end. And this end is near at hand. There are no revolutions of tedious centuries between it and you. A few months, at the most, a few years, will put you in possession of all that the God of heaven has promised, and exceeding abundantly above all that your most towering hopes have desired.

Repine then no more under bodily infirmities. Regard them, if you will, as tokens of your dissolution, as preludes to the shroud ; they are so—but what are they besides ? The tokens of coming glory ; the preludes of an approaching deliverance from all sin and all sorrow ; the forerunners of a meeting between you, and whom ? Patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles ? Friends whom you have loved and lost ? Yes ; and One greater and more beloved than all these. You shall see that Jesus who is all your “salvation and all your desire,” whose name is the hope of all the ends of the earth, and whose presence is the glory of heaven, the fulness of its joy.

SERMON II.

THE LABOURERS STANDING IDLE AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

ST. MATTHEW XX. 6.

About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

TO make a right use of this question, we must consider it as addressed by the great God this very hour to ourselves. And thus considered, it reminds us that before we die we have all a work to perform, that some of us have long been standing idle, neglecting this work, and that this neglect ought to become at once a subject of our most serious concern. On these facts we may ground three questions, which are so simple, that a child may comprehend them; and yet so important, that he is the wisest man amongst us, who thinks of them the most.

I. The first is this—*What is the work which the great Lord of all has given us to do?* Under the figure of a householder, he calls upon us to work in his vineyard. And what is his vineyard? It is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This, whether in a suffering or a glorified state, he will have a scene of labour.

If we look at it in heaven, all is activity there. Come out of their great tribulation, they who have died in the Lord, rest from the earthly labours that wearied them; but they are not idle in heaven. They are ever before the throne of God, and “serve him day and night in his temple.”

The church below is not quiet. O what a constant striving, what an unceasing labouring is there! Not a soul can be found in it, that is not engaged in a work, compared with which the work of an angel is as nothing. We are sinners, brethren, immortal beings in a ruined condition; and it is in consequence of our ruin, that our labours are so many and so great. We have evils to repair, for which all the hosts of heaven could find no remedy, and obstacles to surmount, which all their united strength could not remove.

1. We have *a dreadful hell to escape*. We were born its heirs, and ever since we were born, our sins have been drawing us towards it, and making it more securely our own. Our first

concern then is a deliverance, a refuge ; our first business, an escaping for our life, a fleeing from the wrath to come ; not merely a smiting on the breast with one sinner, or crying out with another, " What must I do to be saved ? " but a laying hold of salvation, a casting of ourselves on him who " came into the world to save sinners." A man whose habitation is in flames over his head, rests not satisfied with unavailing cries ; he seeks a door, a way of escape. And look at the mariner as his vessel sinks in the waves. What is the one great object of his desires and struggles ? It is the means of deliverance—a boat, a rope, a plank.

2. And then we have *a filthy heart to cleanse*. There is within each of us a swarm of living lusts, which are preying on us and defiling us. These are deeply seated in the soul. They were born and have grown with it. They cling to the soul, and the soul clings to them. They are its torment and its curse, but yet it loves them as it loves nothing else. Here then is a work before us—to discover, to mortify, to kill these lusts ; to " cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; " to labour on a heart that is " earthly, sensual, and devilish," till grace has made it spiritual, heavenly, and divine.

3. And as though this were not enough, we have *a suffering world to aid*. It has pleased God to make his creatures the instruments of his

goodness, to employ whatsoever his hands have formed in diffusing his benefits. The sun, moon, and stars, in their courses, not only declare his glory, but minister to our wants. The beasts of the field and the very plants of the ground are all useful. We too must be useful. It matters not how precious a soul we have to save, nor how polluted a heart to cleanse, nor how many burdens of grief to bear ; we must think of the souls, and hearts, and burdens of others ; we must labour to help them ; we must “ serve our generation according to the will of God.” True religion has its seat deep in the heart, and it loves the secrecy of its home ; but it dares not hide itself in it. It has a labour of love to perform in a ruined world. Into that world it goes, and strives to leave all it can reach there, holier and happier than it finds them.

4. But we must look higher than the worms of the dust ;—we have *a great God to honour*. Why were we sent into the world ? Why are we kept in the world ? Merely to be defiled by its pollutions, and to be worn out by its cares ? No. We have to glorify God in a world that dishonours him ; to praise him where he is blasphemed ; to let the light he has given us “ so shine before men,” as to force those who hate him to do him reverence. Place an angel in hell, how would he act in that accursed place ? Forget or

disguise it as we may, our situation and our duty in this wicked world are nearly the same. We have to be faithful subjects in an army of rebels, to serve God in the dominions of Satan, to shew ourselves his friends among his determined foes.

5. And after all, we have a *glorious heaven to win*; to gain possession of a world to which the spotless beings who inhabit it, have no claim, and from which we are distant as far as guilt can sever us; a world so blessed, that eternity only can unfold its happiness, and so pure, that one unholy thought would banish from it for ever the highest archangel there.

This is the work before us. Say not in your hearts that this is more than the Lord our God requires of us. Brethren, it is less. Put the question to the very lowest of the servants of God; ask him what it is that "his hand findeth to do." He will tell you of sins to be mourned over, of trials to be endured, of enemies to be subdued, of graces to be attained, of many things to be achieved or borne, of which you have heard nothing to-day, and which perhaps have never entered your thoughts.

But judge for yourselves—which of the things now brought before you may a sinner leave undone, and be safe when he dies? Hell, it is plain, must be escaped. May the heart then be left alone? "Without holiness," says the scripture,

“no man shall see the Lord;” and when “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised,” this is one of the awful sayings which will echo through the skies, “He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” And what if we turn away our eyes from a suffering world? The Lord will “turn away his face from us.” Nay, so great is his compassion for the wretched, that on the throne of his glory, he will make our forgetfulness of them the chief ground of our condemnation; “Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” “Depart from me, ye cursed.” And then shall we “go away into everlasting punishment.” May we venture to leave the great God without his honour? He tells us that he will “even send a curse” upon them that “give not glory to his name.” And if heaven be not won, no hope remains; the soul is lost; there is no home for it but the habitations of darkness.

Search the scriptures, brethren. In a concern of such moment as this, it matters but little what ministers say, or friends tell you, or your own hearts think; “God is the Judge.” He will “try every man’s work at the last,” and he will try it by the standard of his own word. Where then shall we go to learn what is required of us? Who shall decide the matter? our Bibles, or our neighbours? we, or our God?

II. Let us now pass on to a second enquiry—*Who are they that neglect the work which God has given them to do?* In a limited sense, we all neglect it ; but this is not the point we have to ascertain. Who among us are altogether, in the full sense of the words, standing idle here ?

In answer to this question, we need not say one word of the great mass of the worldly and careless. Their sad neglect of every thing which ought to occupy them, is as clear as it is tremendous. Let us go amongst those who profess to be spiritually employed, and endeavour to point out the idlers there. And these, in almost every case, are distinguished by one of these three marks.

1. *They are more anxious about other things, than they are about this great work.* I do not say that they care nothing about it, or that it never gives them any concern ; but their thoughts of it are occasional and slight ; called forth perhaps by a sermon or an affliction, and passing away as soon as the affliction is over or the sermon forgotten. Other things affect them more, are more frequently the objects of their hopes and fears, and afford them greater pleasure or pain. Even when the concerns of their souls are brought before them, and they are willing to give them some degree of attention, they find it hard to keep their minds fixed on

them ; heaven easily gives place to the world, and eternity, with all its fearful realities, is lost sight of in some passing thought about the cares, or sorrows, or pleasures of time.

Now if this be the case with us, if we are more "careful and troubled" about any one thing, or about all things together, than we are about heaven and hell, we are the men who are spiritual idlers. A sinner working for salvation is a man of one pursuit, one aim, one purpose. He has heard his Master say, "One thing is needful," and he believes him. He can say with David, "One thing have I desired of the Lord;" and with Paul, "One thing I do."

2. They also are strangers to this work, who *find no difficulty in it.*

Suppose, brethren, you had carried a heavy burden many a weary mile. Faint with your labour, you stand still for a while to rest. A fellow-traveller comes up to you, and while he affects to pity your weariness, he tells you that so much effort is very unnecessary ; that he himself has often borne the same burden now on your shoulders, without difficulty or toil. You find however in conversation with him, that he is utterly unacquainted with the weight of the load. Though no stronger than you, he speaks of it as light, while you feel it almost pressing you into the earth. Now what should you think

of such a man? You would naturally say, "He deceives himself, or he wishes to deceive me. He has never carried this burden a yard."

Come now to the case before us. Some of you say, "Why is religion made so much of? Why cannot we do our duty and go to heaven, without the continued praying and striving, on which this or that minister dwells so often? We are told of the difficulties of religion, but we find little or no difficulty in it. It gives us no trouble. We are able to attend to all its duties without the least care or effort." Is this your language, brethren? Then be assured that you could not tell us in plainer terms, that you are standing idle in the church of God; that, in your case, the salvation of the soul is not even begun; that you have never yet taken one step towards heaven. Difficulty, insufficiency, helplessness—these are some of the very first things of which a really converted sinner is conscious, and all his life long the sense, the feeling of them never goes off. And to what does it lead him? To the earnestness, the striving, the prayer, which you despise. The man sees that he has much to do before his soul can be saved, and he feels that he can do nothing. He finds himself in the situation of a traveller who has many rugged wilds to traverse before he can reach his home, many a long hill to climb, and many a dreary valley to cross;

and yet without the power of moving a single step. You need not be told what follows. In such a situation, a man must pray, must be going to the Holy Spirit every hour for strength, must live every moment in Christ. All the days of his life, his language will be, "Lord, help me. Lord, save me. Hold thou up my goings in thy paths. Take not thine Holy Spirit from me." And what will be his language as he enters heaven? "Not by works of righteousness which I have done, but according to his mercy, he hath saved me." "Not unto me, not unto me, O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise."

3. But there are idlers of another class—*those whom the difficulty of this work keeps from attempting it.*

The eyes of these men have been opened. They know what is to be done; they are not ignorant of the obstacles which must be overcome in doing it. Perhaps they have felt them. There may have been a time, when they actually set about the work of their salvation; but they began it in their own strength, and when difficulties arose, that strength at once gave way, and they were discouraged. They are now at rest. They understand something of the gospel; they are willing to hear it; they are sometimes impressed by it; now and then they are ready to make a feeble effort to secure its mercies; but this is all. There

is no earnestness, no striving, no wrestling, about them. Their religion is a body without a soul, a machine without a spring. They go on for years hearing, reading, thinking about heaven, but doing nothing, attempting nothing. And why? It is useless, they say. The work is more than they can ever perform. If they are ever saved, it must be by the mercy of One who can make excuses for their weakness, and not call them to a strict account for their sloth. Or perhaps they have learned a different language;—"It is in vain for us to pray and strive. We can do nothing. We must wait till God moves us."

In either case, the truth is clear. The mixture of sloth and despondency which we find in these men, stamps their character—they are standing idle. For in what does true religion consist? Surely this is a part of it—a knowledge of the remedy provided for our disease—a calling in to our aid of the strength provided for our weakness—a discovery of the suitableness, the all-sufficiency, the abounding grace of Jesus Christ. Hope in him is as much a part of it, as distrust of self. It may indeed be a fluctuating, perhaps a feeble hope, but still real, operative, constraining. What says the mere pretender to godliness? "I must stand still. I must wait for the Spirit." But what says the true disciple of Christ? He thinks of his glorified Lord, and says, "What wait I for? My

hope is in him." "I am nothing but weakness; but he is the Lord Jehovah, and in him is everlasting strength. He has told me that his grace is sufficient for me, and never yet have I tried it but it has carried me over every difficulty, beaten down under me every enemy, overcome every temptation, restrained every sin, made me happy in every trouble. I know that of myself I can do nothing, but I know also that I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." And then this determined believer presses onwards to heaven, as though he would "take it by force."

All these then are manifestly and altogether standing idle—the great multitude of the openly careless, and, among those who make some pretensions to religion, such as experience no anxiety, no difficulty, no hope; in other words, the worldly-minded, the self-sufficient, and the desponding.

III. Has conscience, brethren, placed you in either of these classes? Has it said to you as you have heard any one of them described, "Thou art the man?" Then do not try to silence its voice. Do not treat the neglect of which it accuses you, as a thing of small moment. Go on with me to ask one question more—*In what light ought we to view this neglect?*

It is plain that God regards it as a very serious

matter. He makes it now a subject of enquiry and reproof; and what will he make it, when he comes in the end to take account of his servants? That is no trifle, which the vast mind of an infinite God deems important; that is no light thing, which ruins an immortal soul. A very little consideration will shew us, that the neglect of the great work of salvation, is a neglect which ought to excite surprise, grief, and alarm.

1. It is a matter of *surprise*; for consider *the place in which you are thus idle*. “Why stand ye here idle?” said the householder; “here, in the market-place; here, where there is so much to be done, and your services have so often been called for?” The labourers had an excuse. No man, they said, had hired them. But we have no excuse. We have all been called to our labour. It is not in the heart of a heathen land that we are idle; it is not in a country buried in popish darkness; it is not in a parish where hell and heaven are seldom mentioned, where there is no sound to be heard but that of “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. You are living in Christian England, in a land of Bibles and churches. You are in a Christian parish. You have long had ministers to warn you. They have come to you as messengers from God. One after another, they have besought you “to flee from the wrath to come;” and when you would not

hear, they have besought you again, and have pointed out to you the way of escape which sovereign mercy has opened. And you, brethren, are motionless ; no nearer heaven, than you were in the morning of life ; and no more labouring to attain it, than the darkest heathen.

2. This neglect is a matter of *grief* also. Think of *the time which you have lost*. It is with some of you the eleventh hour of life. Old age plainly tells you this. And how has your long day been past ? Painful as the question is, put it closely to yourselves ; force conscience to give you a faithful answer to it. Go back to your infancy ; bring before you the days of your youth ; retrace the years of your manhood ; look at your life from the earliest period which memory can reach, to the present hour ;—what is it ? A dream, a blank. What have you done in it ? Nothing. What have you left undone ? Every thing which a dying sinner would wish to have accomplished.

Consider too *how actively and happily these years which you have lost, have been employed by others*. While these labourers were standing idle till the eleventh hour, others, at different periods of the day, had been called into the vineyard, and were now at work there. And what has been passing around you, while you have been leaving the great business of life neglected ? The Lord, at different times, has laid his hand of mercy on

some who were once, like yourselves, thoughtless and idle : and where are they now ? Where are the companions of your childhood, and the friends of your youth ? Some of them are rejoicing in heaven ; and others, whilst you are sinking under the ills of life, are rejoicing on earth ; praising God in their troubles, and even blessing him for them ; longing for the very death of which you can hardly bear to think, and thirsting to see that Saviour before whom perhaps you dread to stand. O how blessed is the state of thousands of your fellow-sinners, while yours is becoming sadder and darker every hour !

And why is this ? Have these men robbed you of your birthright ? Have they exhausted the pardoning love of Christ ? Have their once hard hearts worn out the softening, and purifying, and comforting power of the Holy Ghost ? Have they filled all the mansions of heaven ? No. The way to pardon and peace has been as open for you, as for them ; it is as open still : but the difference lies here—while you have trifled, they have prayed ; while you have only heard of Christ, they have sought him ; while you have laboured for to-day and to-morrow, they have laboured for eternity. And they have not laboured in vain ; through grace, they have won the glorious heaven at which they aimed. But what have you won ? What is the fruit of all your toils in the hard and

cruel bondage in which the world has kept you? One word will describe it all; it is vanity. Nay, it is less, it is worse than vanity. This is the sum of it—"vexation of spirit," bitterness of soul.

3. But we must not stop here. Bad as the past appears, the future is worse. There is cause for *alarm* in the mournful neglect of which you have been guilty. Look forward to its *consequences*. In the concerns of the soul, neglect is ruin, idleness is destruction. The man who says to his soul, "Take thine ease," will find ease gone from him for ever, when his soul is required of him. He may say, "I have done no harm." These loiterers in the market-place had done no harm, yet they were reproved. The unprofitable servant in another parable had done no harm; he had been upright and honest; but he was cast "into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

And these consequences are as near as they are certain. Where are you standing? Whither have "the few and evil days" of your life brought you? There may be a span, a few short steps, between death and some of your fellow-sinners, but you are on the very brink of the grave, on the borders of eternity. And is this a situation for repose? Is this a time for stupid unconcern, for silly trifling? for wearing out the little strength which is left you, in caring, and grieving, and

planning for the world ? for a world which you are on the point of leaving for ever, and which you have often wished you had never seen ?

O my aged brethren, you who have been spending a long life in vanity and all your years in trouble, let me implore you not to rest satisfied with unavailing regrets about the past ; look forward to that which is before you. Think of increasing infirmities, of an opening grave, of a descending Judge, of a dark eternity. A night is closing round you, in which no man can work. Think of it, and as you think of it, hear the very same voice that said to you in the morning of life, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," now saying to you, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?"

What is your answer ? Do you say, "What answer can we make ? Our sins are so many, our bad habits so confirmed, our minds so weak, our souls so completely dead, there is no help, no hope for us. What grace can change an old man's heart ? What mercy can save an old man's soul ?" Brethren, are you really anxious to have your heart changed ? Are you heartily willing to have your immortal spirit saved ? Then turn once again to this parable. At the eleventh hour, these labourers were admitted into the vineyard ; at the eleventh hour, they began their work ; and when the evening came, they had their reward. Here then is encouragement for you. Here then

is a warrant for assuring you that your day of salvation is not yet ended ; that there is grace which can renew, and mercy which can save, and goodness which can bless you ; that all the unsearchable riches of Christ are yet within your reach. But you must be in earnest. There must be no hesitation, no delay. The work is too great, the time is too short, to admit of it. If you are ever saved, you must be saved promptly, quickly ; just as a brand is saved from the flames, which are already surrounding it ; you must be “snatched from the burning.”

There is in fact only one thing which men in your situation can do—cast yourselves on the Lord Jesus Christ, as those who feel that without him they can do nothing. Make him at once your hope, and your only hope. “His blood cleanseth from all sin ;” his grace is sufficient for every sinner ; his righteousness is “unto all and upon all them that believe ;” “he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.” Believe these gracious declarations ; and then instead of ending your days with the complaint of despairing Israel, “Woe unto us, for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out !” every trembling sinner amongst you may take up the language of the happy Simeon, bless God and say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace

according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

To those who are indeed *the servants of God*, this scripture is not useless. You are in the vineyard of Christ ; you have been there perhaps for many years ; but how came you there ? Whatever were the outward means which led you thither, or whatever the time when they were made effectual, it was "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," which separated you from an ungodly world, and made you labourers for heaven. It is the same grace that keeps you from forsaking the work which you have begun. You are working out your salvation, solely because God in his mercy continues to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

"Where is boasting then ? It is excluded." The pride of your hearts can find nothing to rest in. The simple question, "Who made thee to differ?" lays it low. And what a crowd of feelings rise up one after another in its place ! Wonder, joy, love, praise, and perhaps, stronger than all, self-abasement, shame ! To be idle in the market-place is sad, but we have often stood idle in the vineyard. Amidst the weighty cares, the awful realities, which occupy the church of Christ, we have been taken up with lying vanities, the trifles of an hour. We need pardon for the past, as much as the guiltiest of our brethren ;

and grace for the future, as much as the weakest. Let us seek them. And while seeking them, let us look forward to the time when our present labours will come to an everlasting end. "The time is short," brethren. A few more toils and conflicts will bring us to the evening of our wearisome day. We shall rest then from its "heat and burden." We shall stand in the presence of the great Lord of the vineyard. Before his Father and his holy angels, he will give us the reward which his own blood has purchased, his own labours have prepared, and his own power secured. And who can estimate its worth? It is so great, that while it puts honour on the unworthy sinners who receive it, it brings glory to the exalted Being who bestows it. It is nothing less than "the joy of our Lord," a share in that rest, that blessedness, which satisfy an infinite God.

SERMON III.

THE BUILDING OF THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE.

I KINGS vi. 7.

The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building.

THE house built in this mysterious silence, was the first temple at Jerusalem. Of all earthly objects, this, to the ancient Jew, was the most sacred and dear. If he loved his God, it was the scene of his sweetest joys. If he loved him not, he loved his temple. It was the subject of his earliest impressions; he saw in it a memorial of the past history and honours of his nation; he looked on it as a magnificent display of his country's wealth. It was his glory, and he made it his pride. We accordingly find the recollection

of it associated, in his mind, with every thing he deemed excellent or great.

The men who wrote the scriptures, partook of this feeling. Would they raise the believer in Jesus to his highest honour? "Know ye not," says one, "that ye are the temple of God?" Would they describe the church in her brightest glory? The beauty of Zion is made an emblem of her. The church is represented as "an holy temple," designed and building for its Creator's praise.

And where does this new and living temple stand? Let us look at it as resting on its everlasting foundation in the lofty heavens. There its walls have long been rising; there "the whole building, fitly framed together, groweth;" there, in the end, will all its grandeur be displayed. The subject before us then, is a view of the redeemed church as a temple now building by God in an eternal world.

I. In thus contemplating it, look, first, at *the materials of which it is composed*. And what are they? They came to it from a very far country. Heaven itself could not supply them. In themselves, they are worthless; but the means which have been employed to remove them hither, have made them costly, precious. They are an innumerable multitude of sinners, brought from the

fallen world on which we are standing—materials strange indeed to be employed in such a place, but better calculated than any other, to manifest the wisdom and the power of God.

They are well described as “stones made ready.” A stone, in its original state, is rough and unshapen, incapable of separating itself from its native rock, and even if separated, unfit for the workman’s use. It may serve for the wall of a mean and humble structure; but the builder of a temple will not touch it. Now this is precisely our natural state. It was once the state of all the redeemed. Isaiah tells us so. “Look,” says he, “unto the rock whence ye were hewn; and to the hole of the pit,” the quarry, “whence ye were digged;” reminding us, that as the rude stone not only belongs to the rock, but forms a part of it, so they who are now shining in heaven, not only once lived in a world of sinners, but were themselves sinners; involved in the same darkness, and guilt, and wretchedness, as ourselves; ignorant of the glorious end to which they were destined, incapable of contributing the least to its accomplishment. They might serve the purposes of this lower world, be useful and even ornamental in it; but there was no place for them in heaven. They would have sullied its purity, and defaced its beauty.

But a blessed change at length transformed

them. These stones were “made ready” for a glorious building: these senseless, mean, sinful beings, were prepared for heaven. And the work was God’s. He selected them, chose them out from among their fellow-sinners, and then formed them a people for himself. Putting into their hearts his Holy Spirit, he did what none other could accomplish—he rent them and the world asunder; separated them from it; made them weary of it and unlike it; taught them to look higher, to think of heaven and seek it; and then, by a series of providences, by disappointments, and tribulations, and conflicts, by consolations and mercies, by motives drawn from his love, and hopes and fears resting on his word, he made them meet for the employments and joys of heaven, prepared for glory. They are now “without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.” Even in his sight who “chargeth his angels with folly,” they are “all glorious within,” all splendid without. The exterior of his earthly temple at Jerusalem was of polished marble; it glittered, we are told, with a snowy whiteness; and nothing was seen within but cedar and gold: but as for his heavenly house, he calls its walls, “Salvation,” and its gates, “Praise.”

Here, brethren, stands revealed that truth, which every view that we can take of heaven confirms—“Ye must be born again.” You must

be wrought on, changed, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, or never see your God. And this work must be done ere you die. The stones were made ready, not in this house, but before they were brought thither." No axes nor hammers were found there to prepare them. Nor are any means of grace to be found beyond the skies. There no preacher warns, no afflictions soften, no patient Saviour entreats, no Spirit strives. Thousands of sinners have been glorified in eternity, but not one converted, not one sanctified, not one pardoned. The ground you are standing on, is the only ground in the universe of God, on which the sinful can be made fit for heaven. Leave it in love with the world and sin, not separated, not made ready, and as surely as the only book which brings "immortality to light" is true, you will be cast aside by the great Lord of all as a mean, polluted thing, not meet for his use; unfit for that building where the glories of his grace are seen, and suited only for that dreadful place which is destined to shew forth the terrors of his wrath. Marvel not then that he who spake as never man spake, has so often said to you, "Ye must be born again."

II. Let us look, secondly, at *the foundation of this heavenly building*. And how wonderfully adapted is this to the materials of which it is composed!

The sinners who are now rejoicing in glory, had another world once given them. It was a good, a fair and happy world : but they lost it ; at least, they lost its happiness, and covered it with misery and death. They have now another kingdom bestowed upon them ; but will they not lose this also ? The fallen angels once possessed it ; but, though they excel in strength, they kept it not. How then shall worms of the dust be safe in so high a station ? The same omnipotent Being who redeemed their soul from destruction, and formed them for heaven, has covenanted, pledged himself, to keep them secure for ever. Hence, if we speak of them as a building, the Holy Spirit testifies of him as the foundation on which it stands. He is its chief “ corner-stone,” the support, the security, the immovable resting place of the whole fabric. The apostles and prophets are indeed spoken of as its foundation, but only because they bear testimony to Christ ; because they all unite in this saying, “ Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

He sustains this relation now to the church on earth, and he is as ready in his love, as able in “ the greatness of his strength,” to bear the weight of the far loftier and wider church above. He does bear it. There is not a sinner in his kingdom, who does not depend on him for every

moment of blessedness he enjoys. It is he who preserves him from the enemies that harassed him below. It is his grace which keeps his robes so white, his palm so green, his crown so glorious.

And it will always be thus. The redeemed will ever need a support, and they will ever find one in the Lord Jesus Christ, a quiet resting place, "a sure foundation." The convulsions that shake the worlds from their places, will not throw down a pillar, nor even loosen a stone of this mighty structure; the events of eternity will not move it. There is underneath it a living, an everlasting Rock, on which it is not only built, but to which it is united. It is in it, become a part of it; so that it can no more be torn from it, than that Rock itself can be shivered and destroyed. "In Jesus Christ," says Saint Paul, "all the building groweth." "In him ye also are builded together." "Because I live," says the eternal Saviour himself, "ye shall live also." "The glory which thou gavest me," said he to his Father, "I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."

And does not this exercise of the Redeemer's grace endear him, brethren, to your hearts? It endears him to his Father. Saint Peter speaks of him, not only as "chosen of God," but "precious" to him; and why? Because he is the chief

corner-stone of his spiritual house. There is a suitableness in him for this office, a sufficiency, a display of care, and love, and strength, which delight even an infinite God. O with what inconceivable complacency will his Father say of him, when he looks on his finished work, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!"

III. We may go on to notice, thirdly, *the manner in which this temple is built.*

1. Like almost every work of its great Author, it is accomplished *gradually*. The first stone of it was laid on its sure foundation, when righteous Abel found himself in glory; and since that period, another and another has been added, according to the good pleasure "of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Sometimes it has risen slowly; at other times it has advanced with wonderful rapidity; but, at all times, "the God of all grace" has been employed on it, so that the building has increased in height and glory through all generations. In the present day, the Lord is hastening his work. He is "adding to his church daily such as shall be saved;" and after he has made them ready, he takes them from this his earthly habitation, and fixes them, one after another, in their places, in his fairer temple above.

Now he takes one from this congregation, and puts him in the place designed for him ; then he goes to another people, and finds there the soul that is to shine in glory next. At one period, he prepared almost every stone from one pit ; took his redeemed chiefly from one nation, the seed of Abraham his friend. Now he goes from country to country, from island to island, from clime to clime : one hour, calling to his kingdom a sinner of Christian England ; the next, saying to one of heathen Africa, “ Come thou also hither :” now bidding an aged pilgrim “ depart in peace” to his long wished for rest, and now stooping down, and bearing some new-born babe to an unlooked for glory. He says to the north, “ Give up ;” and then he turns to the south, and says, “ Keep not back. Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth, even every one that is called by my name ; for I have created him for my glory ; I have formed him ; yea, I have made him.”

2. This temple is building also *constantly*, steadily, surely ; without interruption or hindrance. Earthly structures do not proceed thus. Unforeseen difficulties embarrass, and unavoidable delays retard. Sometimes the design of the builder is changed ; at other times, he is baffled in carrying it into effect.

It is not so however when God builds. His

purposes never change ; they can never be frustrated. "Before the mountains were brought forth," he formed the stupendous plan of his heavenly house. It was the work, the masterpiece of his infinite skill ; and it contains "treasures of wisdom and knowledge," which angels cannot explore, nor eternity unfold. The directions given for the Jewish temple were minute ; but in this more glorious edifice, nothing was overlooked. It was "ordered in all things, and sure." In those eternal councils of which human folly may speak, but concerning which human wisdom can form not one faint conception, all that respects the salvation of the church was forever established. The means of carrying it into execution ; the time when its great Author should be revealed ; the sinners who should attain its blessedness ; the station they should each occupy below, and the place they should fill above ; the instruments by which they should be turned to God ; the afflictions which should subdue, and the consolations which should refine them ; "the work of faith, and labour of love," which they should perform ;—all were fixed by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and never have they known alteration, or seen the shadow of a change.

We know but little of the magnificence of this plan, but were it possible that it could be yet

more vast, we know that there is ability in Christ to perform it all. His people, though more numerous than the stars of heaven, shall all "be willing in the day of his power;" and as for his enemies, they can no more impede his designs, than a host of worms could delay the rolling of the glorious sun. "I will work," says he, "and who shall let it? My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." And what is this pleasure and this counsel? He himself informs us; "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off: and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel, my glory."

3. Thus goes the building on, gradually, constantly; but yet, all this time, *silently*.

Turn again to the Jewish temple. "There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building." This silence has something in it deeply mysterious. It could not have happened from mere chance. It was undoubtedly enjoined by God, and intended to impress on the minds of the Israelites some important truth. The question is, What is that truth? And this is not easily answered.

We shall not however materially err, if we say that the stillness with which the building of the temple proceeded, intimates, first, *the unnoticed*

and secret manner in which God carries on his purposes of grace in a tumultuous world. What is the history of the world? A history of commotions. Its great men have seldom moved, but "confused noise and garments rolled in blood" have marked their footsteps. Strifes and contentions have been necessary for the accomplishment of their designs, and they have freely raised them. They have struggled, till whole kingdoms have resounded with their deeds, and this poor, distracted earth has resembled "the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." But God, in the midst of them, unperceived and almost unthought of, is bringing his own purposes to pass; is making "the wrath of man to praise him," and the wickedness of man to do his will. He presides in the storm. The waves thereof toss themselves, but he turns every billow that swells to the furtherance of his own glory. "The Lord sitteth above the water-floods; yea, the Lord remaineth King for ever."

The silence in this temple may remind us also of *the secret operations of God in the souls of men.* Sometimes he turns their thoughts to himself by the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, by means which are visible and striking; but it is generally in "the still small voice," that he manifests himself as the God of their salvation. The seed is sown in their hearts they know not when.

“It groweth up they know not how.” It brings forth fruit, of which they themselves are often unconscious. They are ripened for heaven in a way which they understand not; and then they die, and go there by a road which none can discover. They lie down in the grave, and all is silence. And what a peaceful world do they enter! How unlike the restless, jarring, feverish scene, which they have left behind them!

The stillness among the Jewish builders might be designed to remind us of the quietness of this world, of *the peace of heaven*. All there is unbroken calmness. Changes and afflictions have ceased. The souls they so often assailed and wrought on, need them no more. They are no longer earthly; they are heavenly and faultless now. All is purity, and perfection, and brightness. The work is done; the instruments therefore are thrown aside; and, valued as they once were, who will wish to feel them again? Not a sound is heard, but the voice of overflowing blessedness and the songs of praise.

Now what may we learn from this part of our subject? We are taught *not to despair of the cause of God even in the darkest scenes*. Look where we will, the state of the world is indeed deplorable. It ought to cause “rivers of waters to run down our eyes.” But then, brethren, let

us not forget that amid all its clamour and strifes, the work of God is going gradually, surely, silently, on. Let us remember that one proud, contentious man will make more noise in his way to a world of discord, than many holy men will make in their way to heaven. We hear the voice that is lifted up in the streets, the conqueror's shout, the wrangler's curse, and the worldling's song; but we hear not the prayer of the broken heart, we see not the bended knee, we mark not the spirit that in this cottager's hut, or in that poor man's dwelling, bursts joyfully from its prison of clay, and is carried home by the angels to its God. "I am left alone," was once the natural language of a despairing prophet; but what saith the answer of God unto him? "I have reserved to myself seven thousand." "Who hath believed our report?" asks the Christian minister in sorrow and perhaps in tears;—at the very moment, the man who from sabbath to sabbath has listened unheeded to his voice, may be in tears also, and this secret cry may be going up like incense to the skies, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

We may learn here too *the character of true religion*. Nothing is more common in some parts of our land, than an ostentatious, noisy display of affected piety. Many have learned to dispute

and decide, who have never yet learned to cast down one proud imagination ; never even tried to humble themselves and mourn.

The young especially are in danger of falling into this evil. They have vain hearts, and whatever offers to make them great, will often lead them captive. Let the young then remember that "there was no noise heard in the house while it was in building." Beware of a love of display. Beware of a bold, forward, unmeaning tongue. It will please, it will deceive none but the simple ; it will disgust all the wise. Let your tempers, let your lives speak with a louder voice, than your words. True religion is a silent, humble, retiring thing. It communes with its own heart, and is still ; it prays in secret ; it weeps apart and alone. It will indeed unbosom itself freely at times, but not in a crowd. It is as modest, as it is bold. It will come into public notice, rather than leave misery unrelieved, ignorance unaided, or any duty undone ; it will brave the opposition and cruelty of a whole world, rather than sin ; and then it will retire into its closet, and be seen only by its God. You have heard "of the calm retreat ;" you have sung perhaps of "the silent shade." O let them not be known to you merely in poetry and in song. Seek them ; love them ; let them be daily witnesses of your prayer and praise.

IV. There is one point more to be considered—*the great end for which this heavenly temple is raised.* And this perhaps is too often overlooked. We frequently think of salvation as merely an act of mercy ; as designed for no other end than the rescuing of a multitude of immortal beings from a wretched hell, and the carrying of them to a glorious heaven. But this is nothing more than the means for the accomplishment of a farther and a higher end. And what is that ? The manifestation of Jehovah's glory.

The temple of Solomon was not built for this single purpose, that it might be “a house of prayer for all nations.” It was designed to be the habitation of God, the seat of his presence, and a monument to his name. And this heavenly temple is erected for the same purpose ; not so much for the sake of the living and shining stones that compose it, as for the honour of its great Builder ; not so much for the salvation of the poor outcasts of the earth, as for the glory of the power, wisdom, and grace of the great God of heaven. “Not for your sakes do I this,” said the Lord God to Israel, even of the temporal deliverances he vouchsafed them, “but for mine holy name's sake.” “This people,” says he of his redeemed, “have I formed for myself ; they shall shew forth my praise.” “He hath chosen us,” says Saint Paul, “that we should be holy

and without blame before him in love"—for what end? "to the praise of the glory of his grace." "In the dispensation of the fulness of times," says the same apostle, "he will gather together in one all things in Christ; both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance;" and still the same great design is before him—"that we should be to the praise of his glory." The exalted Saviour too, when he sends his errands from heaven to the churches, speaks the same language; "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God," a monumental column to his praise.

And this consideration, like every other in which the divine glory is involved, is full of unspeakable comfort to the Christian heart. It would be sweet to live in heaven, as the angels live there, happy in the sight of God, and rejoicing in his love. But when I enter heaven, I shall stand there as a monument to my Redeemer's honour. I would honour him on earth. My heart's desire and fervent prayer is to testify my love for his blessed name. But this treacherous soul of mine is often cold in his service. And when I would glorify him, I sometimes cannot; flesh and heart fail me, even when my love burns. There have been times too, when my base words or actions have dishonoured that worthy name by

which I am called. But my warfare will soon be ended. I can never disgrace my Saviour then. The grace that has saved me, will be displayed in all its wonders. I shall become a spectacle to angels and to men. The hosts of heaven, as they look on me, will adore with deeper reverence Jehovah's greatness; and when my feeble voice is heard among them, O with what a burst of praise will they exalt the power, the love, that could raise one so vile to so high a place! To be a pardoned sinner on earth is a mercy so great, that it sometimes overpowers me; but to be a pardoned sinner in heaven, to afford, as it were, a fresh revenue of glory to its great King in his own house—this is a mercy which passes all my thought! It is worth even the precious price that was paid at Jerusalem to make it mine.

Brethren, will this blessedness be ours? The edifice of which you have been hearing, is not a creation of fancy, the baseless fabric of a dream; it has as real an existence, as the building which now shelters us. It is as true that there are pardoned sinners joyful in heaven, as that there are dying, suffering sinners within these walls. It becomes a question then, and a very solemn one, Shall we ever see this glorious temple? Shall we ever form a part of it? To answer this question we must ask another,—Are we made ready? At any rate, is the work of preparation begun? Are

we separated from the world? living above it? desiring a better country? seeking it? Are our souls emblems of this great building? Are we now “the temples of the Holy Ghost,” “habitations of God through the Spirit?” Is Christ in us “the hope of glory?” If it be thus with us, O how blessed is our condition! We were “once strangers and foreigners;” we are now “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” And what shall we be soon? “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.”

With such a weight of glory before us, shall we repine at the strokes which are making us ready for its honours and happiness? Shall we murmur at the blows which are preparing us for heaven? Let us rather wonder at the condescension which can bestow a single look on materials so worthless. Let us lie meekly and submissively before our God, content to let him carry on his design of mercy in his own way; imploring him never to forsake the work of his hands, and trusting that he who has begun, will surely complete it. What if the blows fall heavy and fast? The sound of the axes and hammers will the sooner cease; or if not, the more honourable will be our place in the building, the more shall we shew forth in heaven the glory of the Lord. And what if, amid all the labour bestowed on

us, the work within us appear for an hour to stand still? This is the word of the Lord, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." "The hands of Zerubabel have laid the foundation of this house ; his hands shall also finish it. He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it."

SERMON IV.

THE PRAYER OF MOSES FOR A VIEW OF GOD.

Exodus xxxiii. 18.

I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

THE blessedness of heaven consists chiefly in seeing God. The man therefore who is heavenly minded, can enter at once into the meaning of this prayer. It expresses nothing more than a feeling with which he is well acquainted, one of the strongest and most cherished desires of his own heart. He too can say, he often has said before the footstool of his God, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

It is plain, brethren, that we have now a very lofty subject before us. Were Moses himself among us, he could not speak of it as he ought. An angel could not elevate our minds to any just conceptions of it. But a greater than Moses or

any angel, is here. The Lord himself is in this place; and he can cause his glory so to shine, that even our feeble eyes may discern its brightness. We must however limit our view of it to one point—let us look on the divine glory as an object of desire to the spiritual mind.

We may consider, first, the circumstances which led to the petition in the text; secondly, the petition itself; and, thirdly, the reasons why every one of ourselves should take it as his frequent and earnest prayer.

I. The great lesson taught us by *the circumstances connected with this petition*, is the wonderful power of prayer.

By turning to the tenth verse of the preceding chapter, we discover the Most High expressing his righteous indignation against idolatrous Israel, and threatening to consume them. But Moses prays for the rebellious people. In the first instance, he endeavours to turn away the divine wrath from them, that it might not cut them off; and as we are told in the fourteenth verse, he prevails.

Still however, to mark his displeasure, the Lord refuses to go any farther with the guilty nation, and intimates, in the thirty-fourth verse, his intention of sending an angel with them in his stead. But no angel, no, nor all the angels in the courts of heaven, can fill up the place of a

departed God. Moses knew this. Hence we find him, in the fifteenth verse of this chapter, once more pleading for Israel. He beseeches the Lord to reveal himself again as the Companion and Guide of their way, and humbly tells him that they had rather stay or even die where they were, in a dreary wilderness, than go into the promised land without their God. "If thy presence go not with me," said the fervent prophet, "carry us not up hence." "What is an angel to us? or what the possession of Canaan, with its boasted hills and fertile plains? These, without thee, will leave us poor; nay, they will make us wretched; they will serve only to remind us of the guilt we have incurred, and the pleasures we have lost." And here again Moses prevailed. "My presence shall go with thee," answered Jehovah, "and I will give thee rest."

And now surely this intercessor will stop. No, brethren; the more prayer obtains, the more it asks; the more spiritual desires are gratified, the more they are enlarged. Moses turns from Israel to himself. With a mixture of filial boldness, and trembling reverence, and holy transport, he abruptly cries, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." And this bold petition too is granted. In a moment comes from the cloudy pillar this gracious answer, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

See here then what prayer is and what prayer does, its nature and its power. It is a longing after God, which nothing short of the full enjoyment of God can satisfy. And as for its power, it can do all things. It knows no other bounds than the good of the sinner on the one hand, and the omnipotence of Jehovah on the other. "Open thy mouth wide," says the Lord, "and I will fill it." Ye shall ask what ye will," says Christ, "and it shall be done." The pardon of all our sins, free, complete, and eternal; a victory over every lust; the presence of God with us all through this dark world; his glory passing before our eyes, and shining into our hearts; guidance, protection, strength; heavenly consolations while we live, and heaven itself when we die;—all are within the reach of prayer; within our reach; nay, held up, as it were, before our face, with this inscription shining on them all, "Ask, and ye shall have." "Mercies purchased, prepared, waiting, for praying man."

And which of these mercies is now the object of this prophet's desire? One of the highest of them all—a clear and full discovery of Jehovah's glory.

II. Consider, secondly *his petition*.

Its precise meaning is not easily discovered. Perhaps Moses himself could not have defined it. It might be that he wished to behold God with

his bodily eyes, face to face, as his angels in heaven behold him. In this sense, he is told, in the twentieth verse, that his prayer is vain. The King of kings "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." He is one "whom no man hath seen or can see." He accordingly declares to Moses, "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me, and live." And yet in the verse preceding, the great Searcher of hearts appears to have understood his praying servant in a different sense. He says, in answer to his request, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee."

And mark how this promise was fulfilled. Moses is ordered to ascend mount Sinai. There the Lord meets him, but still hidden from his sight by the same veil which had before concealed him. "He descended in the cloud, and stood with him there." And what followed? Was the cloud rent asunder, and the Lord of the universe disclosed in all the majesty of his greatness? No. The prophet may strain his expecting eyes, he may strive to pierce the covering of the Holy One; but the cloud passes by him, dark and impenetrable. He sees nothing; but as it rolls along, he hears a voice proclaiming from the midst of it "the name of the Lord." And how did this proclamation run? In this august and yet

gracious style ; “The Lord ; the Lord God, merciful and gracious ; long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ; keeping mercy for thousands ; forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”

We are warranted then in coming to this conclusion—the chief, if not the only object of the prophet’s prayer, was a clearer manifestation of the divine perfections, a greater knowledge of God, a more enlarged and a closer view of those attributes which constitute his glory.

1. Hence we are taught by this petition, that *there is more glory in the perfections of God than his most favoured servants ever saw.*

Why was not Moses satisfied ? He had seen the power of the Almighty in the wonders he had wrought in Egypt. He had trembled at his majesty amid the blackness, and darkness, and terrific grandeur of mount Sinai. For forty days and forty nights, he had been surrounded by his brightness, while he received the law from his mouth. His patience had been displayed in the murmurings and idolatry of Israel. The smitten rock and descending manna proclaimed his goodness. What more could a child of the dust require ? What more could he bear ?

If we turn to ourselves, why need we offer up this prayer ? Who can look around, and not discover his Creator’s glory ? Would we see his

power? A thousand shining worlds declare its greatness. His goodness? The earth is full of it. His wisdom? It is visible in every blade of grass, in every movement and vessel of our frame. His justice? Every opened grave proclaims it; we feel it in the griefs and troubles of every hour. His patience? We have tried it, and know it to be almost boundless.

And then if we turn from the vast creation and from providence, to the revelation made of God in the gospel of his Son—what can an angel want farther? There, “in the face of Jesus Christ,” shines his glory in its full radiance. There “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” display themselves. There justice, as it leads the Holy One of Israel to the cross, fills us with awe. There mercy and love melt us. There grace shines in its freeness; providing a Saviour for rebels;—in its sovereignty; passing by the angels that sinned, and making lost man its object;—in its unsearchable riches; bringing the Fellow of Jehovah from his throne, clothing him in mortal flesh, surrounding him with earthly pollutions, and pouring into his soul more than earthly griefs, casting him on the ground at Gethsemane, condemning him at Golgotha, crucifying him in gloom and terrors at Calvary, laying him mangled in the grave. O what an exhibition of every divine perfection is unfolded here! Who can look

on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and still say to Jehovah, "Shew me thy glory?" Every one, brethren, who looks on it in faith. The very sight of the glory which is manifested there, will make his heart burn to behold it nearer.

There is in the fulness of the Godhead, such an infinite depth and height of glory, that no manifestation can display it all, and no created being, however exalted, can comprehend it all. Take the highest creature in the universe; place him in the immediate presence of God, before his throne; and give him all the powers which earth and heaven can supply; and let him bend these mighty powers for years and ages to this one effort, to know God—and what has he learned of him? About as much as a mariner knows of an ocean, which he can neither measure nor fathom. The prayer with which he began the work, is as often on his lips as ever. And let another succession of ages roll away, it is the same. He is heard crying with still greater frequency and ardour, "Shew me thy glory." And what does he say to every one who asks him of the knowledge he has acquired? The same that Zophar said to the bewildered Job; "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is

longer than the earth, and broader than the sea."

2. This truth also is implied in the text, that *none but God can give us even that partial discovery of his glory, which we are capable of receiving.*

Here nature, with all her splendid works, is powerless. Enquiry and study can do nothing. Nay, the gospel itself, though sent down as a light from heaven, removes not our darkness. These things may teach us something of God as an object of speculation or science, may give us as much knowledge of him as a map of Eden would give us of paradise; but what is the sum of it all? It is no more to be compared with that sight of God, for which the Christian prays, than studying by a taper the nature of the sun, is to be compared with the light and warmth which gladden us at noon-day.

This Moses knew. With this truth every servant of God is acquainted. Ask him where he obtained his lofty conceptions of the divine greatness, he will trace them, not to the sermons he has heard, nor to the books he has read, nor to the many hours of meditation which he has past: these have been the means or channels by which knowledge has been communicated to his mind, and he is thankful for them; but as for the source of it, he points us to God himself. He tells us that it is a wisdom which has come from

above. He declares with humble thankfulness, that without the special teaching of the Holy Ghost, all the means of grace which he has enjoyed, would have left him as ignorant as they found him; that even in the full blaze of Jehovah's glory, he should have gone down to the grave with his mind dark and benighted, knowing no more to any useful purpose of the Being who formed him, than the brutes which perish.

And this conviction is the fruit of his present experience. There are still times when surrounded by the works of God, with the word of God in his hands and perhaps sounding in his ears, he feels himself shut out from God. He knows that he is near him, but he is near him in a cloud, shrouded in darkness. In spite of all his efforts, he cannot see him. He is no more affected by his glory, than as though the heavens had ceased to declare, and the gospel to proclaim it. And yet wait for an hour. The Holy Spirit shines into that man's heart; and, without adding a single idea, one atom, to his knowledge, he humbles, and elevates, and almost overwhelms him, with a sense of the divine glory.

The testimony of Saint Paul on this point is exceedingly strong. "The natural man," says he, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In another place, he sends us back to the creation of the world. He bids us look on the earth "without form and void," and with not one ray of light to break its darkness. Here, he tells us, is a picture of the mind of man; not of man in a savage, heathen state only, but of man in every state, under all possible circumstances, till enlightened from above. He then reminds us of the voice which said, "Let there be light;" and in the brightness which that voice called forth, he finds an emblem of the wonderful change which the mighty power of God had effected in his own soul, by a discovery of his glory. "God," says he, "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And Saint Peter takes up his language. He speaks of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood;" and whence have they come? "God," he says, "hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

We may now discover the meaning of the prophet's supplication. It is an acknowledgment of the unsearchable glory of Jehovah. It is a confession of the feebleness and blindness of his own mind. It is an earnest request to God, not so much for any new revelation of his character, as for eyes to see and a heart to feel the mani-

festation which he has already made of himself in his works and word. It is a prayer for an inward, and spiritual, and abiding sense of his perfections, such as may give to them a reality and a power which earthly objects may not remove, nor the corruptions of his own heart deaden.

3. But this is not all. There is included also in this petition, *a desire that God would reveal to the soul its own special interest in his perfections.*

We perceive at a glance that this desire must accompany the other. We cannot look with the eye of faith on the great God, without at the same time remembering that he is a God "with whom we have to do," and anxiously enquiring into the nature of that relation which exists between him and us. Is this glorious Being my friend or my enemy? Are these stupendous powers exerted for my happiness or my woe? These are questions that will arise in the heart, as soon as a ray from the Holy One shines on it, and they must be answered before the heart can rest. Left to ourselves, we never can obtain any other than one heart-sinking reply to them. There is so much in God, even in his mercy, to awe us, and so much in our own desperately wicked hearts to discourage us, that, though his great salvation is laid at our feet, we shrink from putting our unworthy hand on so great a blessing. The goodness we adore may be ours, but then it may not

be ours ; and the least uncertainty in an affair of such fearful moment, is almost more than we can bear. "Shew me thy glory," means therefore nothing less than this—"O let me see that the riches of thy goodness can reach to me ; that thy power will befriend, and not destroy me ; that thy faithfulness is pledged to save, and not to condemn thy servant ; that my crimson sins are washed away by thy mercy ; that this guilty soul has found a pardon ; that this vile heart is thine !"

And when this prayer is heard ; when the Holy Spirit shews us God, not as "a consuming fire," but even in his greatness, as "rich in mercy unto all that call upon him ;" when he unfolds before us the book of life, and shews us our own poor names written there ; when we are enabled to look upon the mighty Lord of the heaven and the earth as our reconciled Father through him who "hath made peace by the blood of his cross ;" when we can say to him in his majesty, "My Lord, and my God !" and hear him saying to us, "Thou art mine ;"—O what a sight of the divine glory have we then ! O what a wonderful blessedness is ours ! This is called "the secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear him ;" "the lifting up of the light of his countenance upon them." This is indeed the unveiling of his face, the shining forth of his glory.

III. Such was the prayer of Moses. Let us consider, in the third place, *the reasons why we should make it our own.*

1. We ought thus to pray, because *such a manifestation of the divine glory is humbling.* And this is the object at which we should be ever aiming, to lie down in the dust; to be delivered from that proud, and self-sufficient, and independent spirit which reigns unchecked in hell, and to feel something of that subdued and lowly frame of mind, which lays angels and archangels prostrate before the throne in heaven.

. But how difficult a work is this! None more difficult or more disheartening. It is easy to use modest and even strongly abasing language concerning ourselves; to call ourselves, within these walls, "miserable sinners," and among our Christian friends, "worms of the dust, viler than the vilest;" but really to "walk humbly with our God;" in very deed to force our high thoughts and lofty imaginations down; to empty the soul of all that has been its pride in company and its confidence alone; to strip it bare, a poor, defiled, guilty, dark, helpless thing;—O this is a work so exceedingly hard, so passing all human strength, that the heart almost breaks in its struggles to accomplish it. But a sight of the divine glory effects it. We behold God, and the dust is our station.

Look at Isaiah. The glory of the Lord fills his temple. He sees it, and the next moment he complains of his uncleanness and his woe. Look at Job. "Mine eye seeth thee," says he to his God; "wherefore I abhor myself." And look at Moses on this very occasion. The Lord revealed himself to him, and then Moses "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped." And what followed? An immediate remembrance of guilt. This is his very next prayer, "Pardon our iniquity and our sin."

2. But humility is not the only fruit of such a manifestation: *a view of God is universally sanctifying*. It transforms the whole soul; "renews it again, after the image of him that created it;" makes it like the God it contemplates.

Is this lofty language? It is; but not loftier than the Holy Spirit has taught a creature of dust and ashes to use. "We all," says Saint Paul, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The face of Moses shone when he came down from the mount; the reflected rays of the divine Majesty lingered on it; the people saw that he had been with God. It is ever thus. No man leaves the presence of Christ, without carrying with him that which will distinguish him from other men; a mind less preyed on by worldly

cares ; affections elevated above worldly vanities ; a holy abhorrence of all that is polluting and base ; a soaring of the thoughts and desires to heaven ; an humble professing and sustaining of this character, a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth, a native of heaven in a foreign land. The world around him will “ take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus ;” for “ the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon him.”

3. Hence we may observe farther, that *a spiritual view of the divine glory is establishing.*

Your natural life, brethren, is every moment endangered. Its continuance is a standing miracle ; at least, it is a standing proof of Jehovah’s omnipotence. Your spiritual life is still more exposed. It is a light burning amidst waves ; a spark on an ocean.

The mere professor of Christianity knows nothing of these dangers which beset the soul. If you are in the way to heaven, you know, you feel them. There are times when they make you tremble. Now how are they to be overcome ? Their origin will point out their remedy. Trace to its source every error that harasses and pollutes the Christian church, every corruption that puffs up the young and blinds the old—you discover folly where you looked for wisdom ; you stand astonished at the ignorance of God in which even the partially enlightened mind can rest,

at the low conceptions of Jehovah's glory at which a worm of the earth dares to stop. One right thought of God would silence half the controversies which distract the world, and make men who now dispute, bend down and pray.

Your safety then lies in the spirit which breathed the prayer before us. Naturally all your ideas of God are narrow and mean. He has, in some degree, enlarged and raised them. Be thankful; but as you value your souls, rest not in any of your present discoveries or attainments. Press forward. Aim, like Moses, at high things. Like Paul, count "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord." Breathe after a nearer and closer communion with God. Deem nothing beyond a sinner's reach, when a sinner pleads in the name of his righteous Lord. There is no humility in turning away from the blessings which God has commanded you to seek; there is no presumption in thirsting for the mercies which he has promised to give. A little religion, a cold, comfortless piety, may be a treasure; but it is one which is easily lost, which it is hardly possible to hold. To think of passing with it to heaven through such a world as this, is to take a lamp which is only half lighted, and expect it to guide you through the tumult of a storm. "The joy of the Lord"—that is "your

strength." "The peace of God"—it is that which "shall keep your hearts."

4. There is one reason more, why we should take this prayer as our own; it is a prayer *which is absolutely necessary*. Shall I say that there is no salvation for the soul without the blessing which it supplicates? without a discovery of the glory of God, of which multitudes, even in this Christian land, know nothing, and which God only can give? The Bible would confirm the saying, but the fearful and dejected might misapply it. This is a plainer declaration, and one which is as true, as that all who live shall die—no man shall see the face of God in heaven, who does not desire to see his glory here on earth. Bring before us a sinner drawing near to heaven, and there is a man whose wishes, in his happiest moments, might all be summed up in this one short petition, "Shew me thy glory."

There is nothing strange in this language, brethren; nothing peculiar to Moses. The scripture is full of it. What are the psalms which are read in your hearing every sabbath-day? Is not this the substance of nearly half of them, "Shew me thy glory?" This is the enraptured cry of the church above; it has ever been the loudest, the most earnest prayer of the church below. Is it your prayer? What do you know of this longing after God?

You have perhaps for many years gone up to the house of God ; you have joined there in many thousand prayers, attended many sacraments, heard many sermons. Now what has been the one great leading desire of your soul in all these things ? Has it been to acquaint yourselves with God ? Can you say, with David, “ One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple ? ” Can you go on with him, and express no more than the feelings of your own heart as you say, “ O God, thou art my God ; early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is ; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary ? ” Then this is the voice which even now reaches the ear of Jehovah, and you are the men of whom it speaks, and the eternal Jesus is the Being from whom it comes, “ Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

SERMON V.

THE TWO BUILDERS.

ST. LUKE vi. 47, 48, 49.

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like; he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

MUCH as all of us within these walls resemble one another, there is yet between us a most affecting difference. Our form and nature are the same; our conditions, and wants, and troubles, are alike;

but beneath this outward resemblance, there lies unseen, and perhaps unthought of, a dissimilarity of the very utmost importance. Some of us are the friends of the living God, while others are his enemies. Some of us will live for ever in unutterable bliss, while others will live as long in unutterable woe; in woe greater than was ever experienced in this world of mercy, and bliss higher than was ever known in this world of sin.

It is this awful distinction in our character and in our end, that the text you have now heard is designed to represent. May the Holy Ghost give you a listening ear and a serious mind, while your attention is directed, first, to the similarity between the men whose conduct is here described, and, secondly, to the difference between them.

I. 1. As to their *similarity*, you will observe that *they were both builders*. Both are described as actually at work. It is clear then that we have nothing to do in this case with the openly profane and careless. Our Lord is referring to persons of a class altogether different; of such as hear, and read, and outwardly respect his gospel; of such as get acquainted with its doctrines, and precepts, and gracious promises; of just such people as we ourselves are.

We are in danger of losing sight of this fact, brethren. We often send off our thoughts out of

this church to others, when the scripture we are considering requires us to keep them fixed on ourselves. Our business now evidently lies at home. The men set before us here are not such of our neighbours as are profaning this sacred day, for each of the persons in the parable is said to hear the sayings of Christ;—they are ourselves, those amongst us, who are now listening attentively to his words.

2. And these men are not builders only; they both, we are told, *build a house*, a fabric of the same description, and intended to answer the same purpose; to be their dwelling place; to be their refuge, their place of safety and comfort, their home.

And all of us have the same objects in view in our religious profession; at least, if we have any objects, they are these—to find a shelter; to get something that will support us under the cares of life, console us in its troubles, and, when eternity comes, be a refuge to us from the wrath of God.

And the house that we raise with these objects in view, is in appearance the same. We all hear the same gospel, all call on the same Lord, all profess to hope in the same Saviour, all desire to dwell in the same heaven.

3. Observe too that the *house of each of these builders has its strength severely tried*. On both, as Saint Matthew tells us, “the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew;” on

both, as we are told here, “the stream did beat vehemently ;” each evangelist applying precisely the same words to both buildings, though differing one from the other as to the exact expressions.

We also, brethren, must expect our religion to be brought to the test. Perhaps it has been tried already. If not, a time of trial will overtake it ; a time when the real character of it will appear, when it will be seen what hold it has on our minds, and what it can do for us.

This trial begins at different periods, and assails in different shapes. Some are called on to undergo it as soon as they begin to separate themselves from a thoughtless world ; others are left alone till a long season of tranquillity has past. In some cases, the storms of tribulation are to be withstood ; in others, the floods of persecution ; in most, the streams of temptation ; and in a few, all these combined.

And it matters not, in this point of view, whether our religion be genuine or false. If it influences our conduct, we shall not be let alone. The world and Satan will allow us to think and feel as we like, but they will not quietly let us act for eternity.

Till this trial comes, we can know but little of ourselves. Almost any religion will stand in a calm. It is temptation—trifling, worldly, and

sensual companions ; it is affliction—disappointment, poverty, sickness, mental oppression ; it is a change of scene, or circumstances, or society ;—these are the things which shew us what manner of men we are, and often surprise and confound us by the discovery they make.

But even if we could escape all these things, we cannot escape the trial of that day which will lay bare the secrets of every heart ; a day which will place an assembled world at the judgment-seat of Christ, and leave not a single self-deceiver unstripped, not a single hypocrite undismayed, not one trembling believer disappointed or unblessed.

II. Thus far then we trace a perfect similarity between these two characters ; and this similarity is to be found in real life every day and in almost every place. Men who are Christians in name only, often bear so close a resemblance to those who are Christians in truth, that the most quick-sighted observer fails to perceive the difference. It is known only to their own hearts. It is perhaps unknown even there ; neither they themselves, nor men, nor angels, mark it ; none but the heart-searching God. Still this difference though for a time concealed, is great, is most important, is in fact such, that in the midst of fair pretensions, and promising appearances, and blameless con-

duct, and perhaps lively feelings, it ruins the soul. Let us proceed then to enquire wherein this *difference* frequently consists.

1. *One of these men built his house with foresight; the other heedlessly.* When they began to work, the air was quiet and the sky clear; no storms were rising, nor floods swelling. One of them was deceived by this calm, and built his house as though it were to have little or nothing to try it. The other, on the contrary, expected winds and rains, the rushing torrent and the boisterous tempest; and he acted accordingly; he built a house that would withstand their shock. Now a real Christian resembles him in caution. Other men are satisfied with a religion that will answer their present purpose, quiet their own conscience, and make them respectable among their neighbours. There is no forethought, no spirit of enquiry, no earnest anxiety to be right, mixed up with it. And the reason is plain—they are unacquainted with the greatness of the evils for which they need a remedy. They have never really known the plague of their own heart; never seen their guilt in its true colours; never felt the condemned, perishing, and helpless state, into which sin has brought them; never discovered how near they are standing to a dreadful hell. They have slight views of the law, slight views of sin, slight views of the awful holiness of God.

Not so however the true Christian. The Holy Spirit has shewn him the misery of his lost condition, enabled him to see his present wants and the evils that are coming on him. A religion therefore which will satisfy his own conscience and his neighbours, is not what he cares for; he wants a religion that will bring pardon and strength with it, purity and salvation; a religion that will satisfy his God. He looks forward. It is for futurity that he most anxiously wishes to provide. He labours for something that will endure a storm; a faith that will support him when every thing else gives way; a hope that will bear him up when conscience stings, and Satan accuses, and death strikes; a refuge for his soul amidst the convulsions and terrors of a departing world.

2. And this foresight causes him to differ in another respect from the mere pretender to religion; for observe that *the first of these men in the parable is a pains-taking, the other a comparatively indolent builder*. One builds his house "on the earth," where he can erect it without much cost or labour: but mark the conduct of the other; he digs deep "into a rock;" and there, while the structure of his fellow-builder is rising rapidly before his eyes, he is employed below the surface, cutting into the unyielding stone.

It is precisely thus in spiritual concerns. It is

an easy thing to make a profession of piety, and as easy, in certain situations, to give to that profession the appearance of reality. We every day see persons who have suddenly attained, without labour or difficulty, a degree of confidence which makes the inexperienced wonder, and the aged mourn. A few short weeks or months seem to have carried them farther towards heaven, than years of prayer and conflict have brought their humble neighbour. They are ready with joy to put on the top-stone of their building, almost before it was hoped that the foundation was really laid. We dare not say that in every case all this fair appearance is fallacious; but this we say, brethren—as you love your souls, aim not at such a shew of piety as this. True religion is a laborious work, and the most important parts of it are those which require the greatest labour, and make the least appearance. The heart must be the chief object of solicitude. Dig deep there. Strive to get that humbled, softened, broken; to get into it something like a just sense of its desperate wickedness, and a just abhorrence of its pollutions. Strive to get its “high imaginations” cast down, its rebellion quelled, its lusts rooted out. Strive to get it touched with the love of Christ, warmed by a view of redeeming grace, made “a habitation of God through the Spirit.” Be practical Christians; men of enquiry, and watchfulness, and

exertion, rather than confidence; of fear and trembling, rather than triumph; of secret prayer, rather than open display. As "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord," aim to strike your roots deep, rather than to raise your heads high; to be prepared for the blasts of winter, rather than to be admired in the summer calm. Bring forth fruit, but let it be fruit "in its season," and "to the glory of God."

3. But there is a still more important difference between these builders; *one looks well to the foundation of his house; the other is indifferent about it.* The building of the one has a foundation, and that foundation stands on a rock, is let into it; the structure of the other has no foundation whatsoever. He chooses the spot that seems to him the most pleasant and inviting, and there, without any farther thought, perhaps in opposition to much friendly warning, he erects his dwelling on a bed of sand.

And here we discover the main difference between the Christian and the mere professor. The Lord Jesus Christ is the rock on which the one stands, while the other is resting elsewhere. In the one case, duties, or prayers, or doctrines, or feelings, are the grounds of the man's dependence; when he has misgivings concerning eternity, he thinks of what he has done, or suffered, or experienced, and is quieted; in the other case, all

these things, as grounds of hope, are thrown aside. There is still a disposition to overvalue them, to lean on them; but the heaven-taught sinner struggles to keep it down. He knows that such a disposition indulged is nothing less than death to the soul; and, casting away his own righteousness, he "submits himself to the righteousness of God." He flies to the great Redeemer, and stays himself on him. In him he finds all that he wishes for, all that he needs. The Lord Jesus Christ becomes his "all in all." So entirely is his confidence grounded in him alone, that could he be separated from him, though he were as devout as David or as holy as Paul, he feels that he must perish, perish as surely and as fatally as the most abandoned sinner. He hears the sayings of Christ, he does them—that is the evidence, the proof of his faith; but it is not his hope—that rests elsewhere, on that "chief corner-stone, elect and precious," which the eternal God has "laid in Zion."

4. There is one point more to be noticed; mark the difference in *the end of these men*. And in order to understand the language in which this is described, we must bear in mind that rains in eastern countries are heavier and continue longer, than in our own. They consequently, in mountainous regions like Judæa, often form torrents; and these, as they rush down from the heights,

are sometimes so furious in their course, that none but the strongest buildings can resist their violence. Hurricanes also frequently accompany them, and add to the devastation they create. Our Lord presents to us in this parable a scene of this kind. He describes the rain descending, the floods gradually rising, the winds blowing; at length the sweeping torrent appears. Now comes the hour of trial. Will the two houses stand? The stream takes them; "it beats vehemently" upon them. One shakes for a moment, and the next moment it is gone. And which is it? The baseless fabric that was erected on the sand. All the labour and expence of the builder are now lost, and instead of finding a shelter in the habitation he had raised, it has served only to proclaim his folly and expose him to shame. And mark the time at which it fell. It was in the storm, in the very hour when the man had the most need of it, and expected the most from it.

And thus does the self-deceiver fall. Affliction perhaps brings him low, or perhaps the prospect of death. In other cases, the assaults of temptation first undermine, and then overthrow his weak principles. The world entangles and pollutes, till it brings him to cast off even the form of godliness. Some bosom sin leads him captive, and at last betrays him.

But even if he stands unmoved by these things,

his religion must come, in the end, to a test which none can escape. In the great day of judgment, "every man's work will be tried as by fire," and then the expectation of thousands will perish, perish at the very moment when they look for it to be realized. In the midst of flattering friends and rising hopes, they die ; and what follows ? A sudden and mournful ruin. "The ruin of that house is great," so great, so tremendous, that eternity cannot repair it, nor time blot out the remembrance of it. We may sigh over the desolations of an earthquake ; we may think of mouldering cities, of Babylon the great, and Rome the powerful, and mourn over the strange havoc which has laid them low ; but what are ruined cities to a ruined soul ? The flaming temple at Jerusalem is said to have forced tears from the eyes of its heathen conqueror ; but what again was the fall of that splendid fabric, when compared with the everlasting destruction of an undone sinner ? The Lord would not so much as stretch forth his arm to save the one ; he sent his only begotten Son to the cross to redeem the other.

But let us turn from this scene of desolation to a brighter prospect. The house on the rock stands. The stream beat as vehemently against it as against the other house, but it could not even shake, much less overthrow it. And what, brethren, can harm the sinner who is resting on

the Rock of ages ? What can trouble do ? It may be felt, but it cannot destroy. Let it “ come in as a flood,” and let persecution and temptation add to its shock ; it may make the feeble sufferer shrink as it approaches ; it may leave on him as it retires some marks of its fury ; but he is neither overthrown nor shaken. And let judgment come ; he is still unmoved. “ Thousands may fall at his side, and ten thousands at his right hand ;” worlds may be wrecked and disappear ; but there stands his house still, a secure and quiet habitation, an everlasting, nay, a glorious monument to Jehovah’s praise.

We are now come to the end of the parable. There are several truths which this review of it ought to leave impressed on us.

It shews us, first, *the object of true religion*. The gospel is one great remedy for human ills, and more especially for that greatest of all conceivable evils, a hopeless eternity. Its main design is not to moralize or comfort, but to save the soul alive. Now a real Christian regards the gospel in this light ; he seeks salvation by it. He needs present consolation as much as other men, and is as thankful for it when it comes ; but this is not his first, his great concern ; he is anxious that it may be well with him at the last, that when he dies, he may have a refuge in eternity.

Is this, brethren, the object at which you are

aiming? Is this the chief subject of your prayers and hopes? Have you ever thought of this? While weeks and years are passing swiftly on, while perhaps labour, and trouble, and sickness are hastening you to your graves, do you ever remember that you have a precious and immortal soul to save? that you have nothing less than hell to escape, and nothing less than heaven to win? Many of us never think of this. Nothing is farther from our thoughts. We build for the world diligently, painfully. O what cares, and anxieties, and toils, do we undergo in the work! But as for eternity, we build not at all; or if we attempt to provide a refuge from its miseries, what is it that we raise? A poor, miserable hut, which the slightest breath lays on the ground.

And how long shall it be thus with us? It will be thus to our dying hour, unless we bestir ourselves; unless we call upon God to arouse us; unless we resolve to lose any thing or every thing, rather than our souls.

We may learn here also *the nature of true religion*. It is something more than a form, a creed, a feeling, a succession of hopes and fears. As it is represented in this text, it is a building, a work, a progressive labour. Its object is the salvation of the soul, and its character is simply this—an earnest and unceasing effort to attain that object, a working out of this salvation. And this it aims

at, not in any way which self-righteousness may dictate or human wisdom prescribe, but in a way appointed by God, and revealed in the gospel of Christ. Our Lord accordingly distinguishes the real from the nominal Christian by this test—the one “doeth his sayings,” the other “doeth them not.” This is in fact the one grand distinction between vital religion and ungodliness, the turning point between heaven and hell.

Is your religion, brethren, of this practical kind? In order to come to a true knowledge of its character, it is not enough that you ask yourselves whether you have heard of the salvation of Christ, and desire it, and have felt your hearts burn at the prospect of it;—have you sought it? Have you actually gone to Christ for it? Have you embraced his gracious offers, that you may obtain it? And how are you living in the world? Look back to the past week. Has your life throughout it been a “life of faith on the Son of God?” a life of self-denial, of humiliation, of prayer, of constraining and active love? What is the present temper of your minds? You are sitting here attentive perhaps, and to all appearance devout; but are you sitting here, like Mary at the feet of Christ, to hear his sayings, that you may go away and practise them? Is the language of your heart, at this very moment, that of the converted Saul, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” If you

cannot bear such questions as these, your condition is sad. You may surpass your Christian neighbour in knowledge, in zeal, in liveliness of feeling, in a reputation for godliness ; your house may rise higher than his, and appear as secure ; but dig deep, brethren, be practical, pains-taking, laborious Christians, or you will soon be without a dwelling, and your souls without a rest.

We discover, thirdly, in this scripture, *the wisdom of true religion*. What is wisdom ? Is it not this—the pursuing of a good end by the best means ? Then the religion of which you have just heard, is wisdom. It is not merely the glorious object which it seeks, that proves it such, for every kind of false religion professes to lead to heaven ; nor yet is it some degree of activity in the pursuit of this object—the foolish as well as the wise builder raised a house : it is the means which it employs, that stamps its character, its simple obedience to the commands of Christ, its earnest labouring after salvation in God’s way and manner. And such a religion can never fail us. That man is “wise unto salvation,” who thus seeks it. “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.” “He doeth the will of God ;” and though “the world passeth away,” he “abideth for ever.”

But let us not mistake. This parable was intended to shew us the necessity of practical reli-

gion, and it solemnly warns us against trying our profession of it by any other test than by our works; but it does not ascribe our salvation to any thing that we can do. On the contrary, it gives to something out of man all the glory of his safety. Why could not the rushing floods shake the house of the wise builder? Because it was better built than the other? No; simply because it rested on a better foundation; "It fell not, for it was founded on a rock." It was the rock, and the rock alone, which saved it.

Hence we may learn, lastly, *the folly of that religion which trusts for salvation in itself*. And yet this is precisely the character of the religion which thousands make their confidence. Ask the great multitude of those who call themselves after the name of Christ, where their hope of heaven rests; they all speak of Christ as the only Saviour, but their answer shews that the ground of their hope is not in him: it is in themselves; in their faith, their knowledge, their experience, their righteousness; in something that can no more bear the weight of an immortal soul, than a quicksand can support a temple, or a reed bear up the heavens.

On what, brethren, is your hope founded? Are you building on a rock, or on the earth? To ascertain this point, you must ask no longer the questions which were before pressed on you. The

enquiry now must be, Have I ever seen the utter insufficiency of all I can do to blot out my sins or save my soul? Am I casting entirely away my own righteousness as a ground of dependence, and resting only on the perfect righteousness, the atoning blood, the love, the grace, the power of Christ? Do I feel that were he to fail me, I should be overwhelmed at last in inevitable ruin? and am I sure that he will never fail me? that he is a "precious corner-stone, a sure foundation?"

It may be that your conscience misgives you, or rather that the Holy Spirit is at this very moment discovering to you the rottenness of your hopes, the madness of your expectations. It may be that, feeling your house shake, you may be ready to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" The question is very easily answered. What advice should you give to a stranger, whom you should discover, in summer, building in a water course, on a spot which you knew would become in winter the bed of a sweeping torrent? What should you say to your brother or your friend, who had laid the foundation of a dwelling on shifting sand? Would you recommend him to adorn, or alter, or even attempt to strengthen his walls? No; your language would be, "Down with it, down with it even to the ground." The same advice we give to you. Painful and humiliating as may be the step, renounce your

present hopes. Begin anew. Place yourselves in the situation of men who have a long eternity before them, without having made the slightest provision for it. Flee to Jesus Christ for safety, as though you had never before heard of his name; and flee to him at once, as though this very night the rains were to descend and the floods to swell, as though this very night death and judgment were to come. The Lord hath "laid in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone:" it is Christ the Lord. He tells you that "he that believeth in him, shall not make haste, shall never be confounded." He tells you too, that if not resting on him, not "rooted and grounded" in him, you must fall. "Judgment," says he, "will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place."

SERMON VI.

THE VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

ZECHARIAH xiv. 6, 7.

It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark ; but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day nor night : but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.

THE time to which this passage relates, is uncertain. It is usually understood as descriptive of the present state of the church, and prophetic of the glorious period which will follow the restoration of the Jews and the conversion of the heathen. We must however wait God's time, not only for the fulfilment of all his promises, but for a full explanation of some of them. Not that we are to pass over any of the prophecies as useless. To a certain point, their meaning is generally

plain. Even when their primary reference to others is doubtful, they often admit of a secondary and instructive application to ourselves.

The scripture before us may be viewed in this light. It offers to our consideration, first, the mixed condition of the servants of God in the present world; secondly, the divine wisdom in allowing it to be thus mixed or chequered; thirdly, the consolation offered us amidst its vicissitudes; and, lastly, the happy termination of all its changes.

I. "It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear nor dark;" it shall be "not day nor night." These figurative expressions well describe *the present mixed condition of the righteous*. By day and night, light and darkness, are meant knowledge and ignorance, sin and holiness, prosperity and adversity, hope and fear. And when it is said that it shall be neither day nor night with the people of God, we are to understand that their condition in the world is neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil, that there is mixture and change in their portion.

1. Look, first, at *their knowledge*;—how limited, how dark is it! This they know, for God has sent down his Holy Spirit to teach it them, that to win Christ is salvation; but how little do they know of Christ, of the glory of his person, the

tenderness of his love, the unsearchable riches of his grace, the depth of his condescension, the height of his greatness ! They talk of heaven, and they know enough of it to long to be there ; but ask them to describe its actual blessedness, and they are obliged to have recourse to terms, to which they themselves can attach hardly one clear idea. And what do they know of God ? of his infinite and eternal nature, of his works and ways ? And what of their own hearts ? They search them indeed diligently, and would know them thoroughly, but they are baffled. There is a desperate wickedness within their breasts, an exceeding deceitfulness, an inconsistency, a strangeness, which they cannot explore. In a word, they have just light sufficient to discover the thick darkness of their souls, just knowledge sufficient to shew them their ignorance, just wisdom enough to bring them on their knees, to make them cry out with the straitened psalmist, “ Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

2. But this mixture of light and darkness is still more evident in *the outward circumstances of their condition*. And we need not refer here to an imprisoned Joseph, or a dethroned David, or a troubled Israel. The whole church of God declares with one voice, “ Thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.” We ourselves have experienced changes ; some of us are experiencing

them still—great and unexpected changes—such as in our childhood and youth we never thought of—such as even now we can hardly believe to be real. We have sung of mercy one hour; the next perhaps we have wept under distressing judgments. To-day the God of providence smiles on us; to-morrow he frowns. Now he lifts us up in the world higher than even our once buoyant hopes ever rose; and now again he sinks us lower than our darkest fears had ever placed us. And all this while we cannot discover what he is doing with us; so perplexing are his doings, so obscure his purposes, that we cannot understand them. All that we can do, is to stand still and wonder; and all that we can say of the matter, amounts to no more than this, “His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.”

3. And how stands the case, if we turn from our outward to our *inward comforts*? O what a wonderful mixture of light and darkness, what strange vicissitudes are there! Comforts indeed we have, comforts that we would not lose for all the pleasures that the world can give, could they all be poured at the very same moment into our hearts; but then how soon are these comforts gone! how easily are they lost! with how much sorrow are they sometimes preceded, and with how much bitterness are they at other times

followed ! Look at the tossed Christian—one hour almost as happy as an angel, the next “of all men the most miserable ;” his mind at one time peaceful as the ocean in an evening calm, at another time “like the troubled sea when it cannot rest ;” now exclaiming, “The Lord is my light and my salvation ; whom shall I fear ?” and now, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me ?” in the morning, singing as if he were at the gate of heaven ; and in the evening, groaning as though drawing nigh to hell.

4. And whence arises this fluctuation of feeling, this mixture of peace and disquietude ? It arises from a mixture elsewhere, from *wavering holiness*. There are changes here also. The justification of every pardoned sinner is ever the same, fixed and immutable as the love of Christ ; but his sanctification is only in progress, advancing indeed, but impeded by many hindrances and liable to many partial declines. He feels “a law in his members warring against the law of his mind ;” “the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ;” faith struggling with unbelief, zeal with sloth, the love of Christ with the love of sin ; impatience sometimes yielding to submission, and sometimes overcoming it ; hope rising out of fear, and fear darkening hope ; heavenly affections soaring upwards to their God,

and earthly desires clinging to the soul and keeping it from its rest.

II. Such is the Christian's day. Whether we look at his knowledge, his outward circumstances, his inward comforts, or his holiness, we discover at once that his sun does not always nor brightly shine; that he is "brought out of darkness into light," but that his day is a day of cloud and storm; that in the present life his state is not altogether evil nor completely blessed. It becomes a question then, Why is it thus with him? And to answer this, we must consider, secondly, *the wisdom of God in allowing the present condition of his servants to be thus chequered.*

1. He acts thus towards them, that *their corruptions may be subdued.* Prosperity and adversity serve as correctives to each other. The evils which the one has a tendency to foster, the other is calculated to counteract.

What should we become, if unmingled prosperity, if uninterrupted sunshine, were our lot in this tempting world? As it was with Hezekiah, it would be with us, our "hearts would be lifted up;" vanity, and pride, and earthly-mindedness would sap the foundation of the little religion we possess, would destroy our souls.

And, on the other hand, continual adversity,

unbroken sorrow of any kind would have its dangers. It is in the night, that the beasts of the forest seize on their prey ; it is in our darkness, that Satan often gives us our severest blow, and leaves on our soul its foulest stain. Who that has been deeply tried, has not experienced something of the weakening, disheartening effect of long continued afflictions ? something of the selfishness, and despondency, and sloth, and aching for the sympathy of our fellow-worms, and that almost unconquerable proneness to make flesh our arm, which are frequently connected with spiritual or mental sorrow ?

Out of compassion therefore to our infirmities, the Lord diversifies our state. That we may not forget him in the light, he sends us darkness ; and then that our feet may not stumble, that our hearts may not fail us in the darkness, he causes the light again to rise on us, and we are comforted.

2. Another end is also accomplished by this procedure—*it brings our graces into exercise* ; it manifests and strengthens them. Some of these are called forth by prosperity only, at least they shine then with peculiar brightness ; such are moderation, deadness to the world, self-denial, humility. Others again are seen only or chiefly in the night of affliction—submission, contentment, patience, all the suffering graces of the Spirit. Hence the “ all-wise God, our Saviour,” so orders

his dispensations, that his people “may be exercised in all manner of godliness,” that they may be “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Sometimes he places them in the immediate light of his countenance, and causes them to glorify him there; and then he brings them into a low and afflicted condition, and there too they bring honour to his name. Were he to keep them in one uniform, unvaried state, half the graces he imparts to them would be hidden, and much of his glory in their sanctification would be lost.

3. This diversified experience is designed also *to bring the people of God to a more simple dependence on himself*. It accomplishes this end by shewing them their own weakness and the divine strength.

How soon, brethren, when the light either of providence or of grace shines on our path, do we begin to think that we ourselves have caused it to shine! We forget that all “our fresh springs” are in God. Our own righteousness, prudence, and foresight rise in our estimation, till we are tempted to believe that we can stand alone, till we find ourselves ready to act as though we could control not the workings of our own minds only, but all the events that concern us in a changing world. The Lord therefore vindicates his honour. Unexpectedly perhaps and suddenly, he changes our condition; or if he leaves that

untouched, he suffers our feelings under it to change : and then, “in the fulness of our sufficiency,” we are “in straits.” We see that we ourselves are powerless. We think of the forgotten language of our God, and are humbled by the recollection of it ; “I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things.” And this is the season which he chooses for a fresh display of his all-sufficiency. Our earthly prospects brighten as suddenly as they were before clouded ; or if all is still darkness there, light springs up within. Stripped of the friends or comforts which seemed but a short time ago our all, we are happier than they ever made us. The Lord no longer “pleads against us with his great power,” but “puts his strength” within us, and we become a wonder to ourselves.

III. Now these considerations, while they shew us the wisdom of God in the changes to which we are subject, are sufficient of themselves to encourage us to bear them without a murmur ; but we may find in the text other *consolations*.

1. It reminds us of *the notice which God takes of our varied condition* ; “It shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord.” And the word signifies more than “known ;” it implies that this varied day, with all its storms and calms,

has been appointed, and ordered, and approved by him. Whatever befalls us, his eye is upon it, and his hand and counsel are in it. He knows all our difficulties, sorrows, infirmities, and temptations; he sees all our conflicts and dangers even before we feel them; and suits his ways to our necessities. There is not a thought in our hearts, but "he understands it afar off;" not a movement, which has not some influence on his dealings towards us.

Mark how this consideration strengthened Job in one of his saddest hours. All was darkness around him. He looked anxiously for his God, but he could neither see nor find him. He remembered however that God beheld him; that though he hid himself, he was near him and working for him; and Job took courage. "Behold," says he, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: but he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

2. We may notice farther, for our comfort, *the harmony of the mixed events of our life*. This also seems to be implied in the text; "It shall be one day," or, as it is translated in the margin, "the day shall be one." It shall be one course of

providence. All the changes in it shall be agreeable to one plan, shall further the same design, shall have the same end. And you know, brethren, what this design is, even your sanctification; and you know what this end will be, your everlasting salvation. The prophet seems to intimate here what an apostle afterwards plainly declared, "All things work together for good to them that love God." They "work together for good." Viewed singly, some of them might appear to injure us; if they befell us alone, they might really injure us; but they are working "together" with other things; they are performing their part in a long and connected plan, and are as necessary for our welfare as the things that most gladden us. Think of the seasons of the year. One follows another, and sometimes intermingles itself for a while with it. The barren winter succeeds the fruitful summer, and often pushes itself into the opening spring; and yet which of the seasons is useless? By their connection with each other, by their mutual influence, they all benefit the earth, and cause it to bring forth fruit for our use.

3. But take this expression in another sense, as intimating *the shortness of this chequered scene*. This mixture of light and darkness shall be for one day only, one short day. And what is life with all its hurry and turmoil, its succession of hopes and fears, and joys and troubles? "It is

but a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Its days may be evil, but lengthen them out to the utmost, they are but few. While we are struggling with its changes, its weeks, and months, and years are hurrying on. While pain and sickness oppress us, they are wearing us out, are leading us gradually to the grave; and there "the weary are at rest."

It is marvellous that we think so little of this truth, and draw so little consolation from it. In the gloominess of our imaginations, we paint a long dark scene between us and the tomb; life stretches itself out before us a dreary and almost endless waste, over which we must pass in tribulation and sorrow; but these dreaded evils may never come. There may be "but a step between us and death." We may even now be standing on the verge of heaven.

I am aware, brethren, that this is low ground for a child of God to take; but we cannot always rise to the higher consolations of the Christian life, and why, in such a world as this, with faith so weak as ours, should we turn away from any source of consolation, which divine compassion has opened? An apostle did not disdain even this. "The time is short," said the troubled Paul; and this is one of the inferences which he drew from its shortness, "It remaineth that they that weep, be as though they wept not."

IV. But this is not all. Consider, lastly, how this short day will end; *the happy termination of all its changes*; "It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."

This promise may be applied to the present life. It may serve to teach the afflicted, that their deliverance is sometimes the nearest, when it seems the farthest from them; that mercy often comes, when we look only for deeper wretchedness. It may also encourage them to hope that their last days will be their best, that the evening of their life will be the holiest and happiest part of it.

But let us give the words a higher meaning; let us consider them as leading us into a heavenly world. They will then bring two facts before us.

1. *The Christian's present state of mingled good and evil will end in a state of unmingled good.* There is no mixture, no change, in eternity. All there is fixed and stable, pure mercy or pure judgment. Hell is set forth as "utter darkness;" and of heaven it is said, "There is no night there;" it is one unclouded, bright, and eternal day. The little light which we enjoy here, is a reflection of its brightness; it is an earnest that we shall enjoy it all hereafter. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." We are only in the twilight now; a bewildering, though a cheering

twilight ; but the darkness will soon be completely past, and the light will shine true and clear. Every thing will come to an end, that now enfeebles, straitens, or distresses us. Our knowledge will be unmingled with error ; limited indeed, but ever enlarging. We shall see God and know God—"see him as he is," and know him "even as we are known." The consequence is, we shall be like God—like him in holiness, for we shall be "without spot or blemish"—like him in happiness, for we shall "enter into his joy"—like him in safety and repose, for we shall receive "a kingdom which cannot be moved," we shall inherit "a crown of glory that fadeth not away." "Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation," says Isaiah to the redeemed church, "and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee ; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself ; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." And what must that light be, which comes immediately from Jehovah's throne ? Look at the sun that he has fixed in the heavens ; our feeble eyes cannot bear its splendour. In heaven, "they that be wise, shall shine forth as that sun." And if a pardoned sinner is so glorious

there with a borrowed lustre, who can measure the glory of him who is the Fountain of life, the source of all the light that ever shone?

2. And this light often breaks upon the soul when the soul looks not for it; *its blessedness comes in an unexpected hour*. "At evening time it shall be light;" in the evening, when we least look for light to come, when our hopes fail us, when we begin to fear that the twilight of a cloudy day will be succeeded by the thick darkness of a stormy night.

Let us think of this promise as we look on the dying Christian. We sometimes find it hard to believe that the blessed change which awaits him, can be real. Can that helpless, sinking, withered frame, that "vile body," be ever made like the glorious body of the Lord Jesus Christ? Can that soul which is now all gloom, or confusion, or insensibility, into which we strive in vain to pour one drop of consolation—can that soul, when a few more hours are past, be filled with all the unutterable joy of its Lord? Can a few short moments carry my poor dying parent, or brother, or child, or friend, from this dark room of mourning, into all the light and glory of heaven? Yes; "in this evening time it shall be light." O may the God of my fathers grant, that when my evening comes, it may be light with me!

We have now gone through this gracious promise. What use shall we make of it? If we make no other, *let it at least excite us to enquire whether we are the people concerned in it.* And to come to a faithful answer of this question, it is not enough that we remember the outward changes we have undergone;—have we experienced any change within? We were “sometimes darkness;” ignorant of our lost condition, blind to the glory of Christ; desperately wicked, and yet trusting in our own righteousness; perishing, and yet thinking ourselves safe;—are we now “light in the Lord?” Do we see as we once saw not? Does the eternity which we once hardly thought of, now appear of tremendous importance in our sight? Is the value of the soul, is the way of salvation, is the preciousness of the Saviour revealed to us? Do we know Christ? Has God “shined into our hearts?” Is the day begun there? If we shrink from such questions as these, this scripture was never designed to comfort us; we have at present no part nor lot in the consolation it affords. The light it speaks of will never shine on our dying bed, nor break on us in eternity. All there will be thick darkness, unbroken despair.

And must the sorrows of life end thus, brethren? Must its changes come to this mournful termination? O flee from this “wrath to come.” Near

as you may be to it, you are called on to escape it; to accept, instead of it, the salvation of heaven.

And this call comes not to you from sermons and ministers only; it is the voice of all the vicissitudes which befall you. Every trouble that grieves, and every mercy that gladdens you, is sent to you from heaven on the same errand, to remind you of a great Saviour and to bring you to his feet. Whether mourning or rejoicing, hoping or fearing, in sickness or in health, in trouble or in peace, this is the gracious call ever sounding in your ears, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." "Give glory then to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

If the light of grace has indeed begun to dawn within us, then let this scripture "sink down into our ears." *Let the young and peaceful Christian remember it.* You love perhaps to hear of such consolations as these, but you do not feel any urgent need of them; and after dwelling on them for an hour, you are tempted to let them pass away from your memories, as though they concerned you not. But you will need them. Your sunshine will not go with you all the way to the

grave. As surely as you are the children of Christ, so surely will he make you acquainted with "the days of darkness." You know not how many of them may be your portion, nor how soon they may come. You know not what clouds may even now be gathering around your path ; what fears, and discouragements, and temptations, and conflicts, may be near at hand. Expect trials ; prepare for them. Take unto you "the whole armour of God." "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Treasure up in your memory its precious promises. When trouble comes, let it find you ready, waiting to receive and strengthened to endure it.

And what does this text say to you *who are beginning to be afflicted and tossed in your way to heaven?* It bids you put to yourselves the question of the troubled Job, "What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Shall we take the comforts he has prepared for his children, and murmur at his corrections? He measures out to us good and evil, light and darkness, with infinite wisdom and love ; and we must learn to receive both with equal thankfulness. There may be changes and counterchanges in our lot ; and what if there be? Through the power of the Holy Ghost, they are subduing our corruptions, exercising our graces, bringing us to a more simple dependence on our

God. And he who sends them, marks them all, controls them all, and turns them all to one blessed end.

Rest satisfied, brethren, with this truth, that however mysterious and perplexing many things within you and around you may seem, they are all parts of one and the same plan; that this plan is continually before the Lord; that it has been so from your cradle, and will be so to your grave; that he studied and arranged it in eternity, and in eternity will glorify himself for the grace which it displays. Your own lips shall praise him there—praise him, not merely for the love that formed you for himself, the Saviour who redeemed, the Spirit who sanctifies, and the heavenly consolations which refresh you, but praise him for the troubles which have brought you low, the conflicts which have made you tremble, the sorrows that have almost broken your heart, and the weakness that has subdued it. And the time is drawing nigh. The night is already “far spent, the day is at hand,” a cloudless, never ending day. Let us look forward to it. Let us look at “the things which are not seen.” Let us think of them till, among all the changes and chances of this mortal life, we can say with the happy Paul, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where

and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

SERMON VII.

THE UNBELIEF OF THE SAMARITAN LORD.

2 KINGS vii. 2.

Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.

WHEN these words were first uttered, there was a famine in Samaria. It was occasioned by the besieging army of the Syrians. With Benhadad at their head, they closely surrounded the city, and by cutting off its supplies, reduced it to a condition of almost unexampled suffering. For some time no prospect of deliverance appeared : all was hunger and despair. At length, in the very height of the distress, the prophet Elisha stands before the king, and declares aloud in the name of the Lord, that on the morrow provisions should be abundant and cheap in the gate of Samaria. Then followed the scene described in this verse. “ A lord on whose hand the king

leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

Now, on the first view, there appears nothing very remarkable either in the speech of this lord, or in the reply of the prophet; but the consequences which followed, give them a very solemn interest. And not only so; as though the Holy Spirit were determined to force them on our notice, they are repeated at the close of this chapter, and with a particularity which leaves us no room to doubt of their importance. The man is evidently held up by God himself as a warning to us. Let us then seriously examine his history. This is very short. Three points will comprehend all that we know of it;—the nature of his sin, its causes, its punishment.

I. *The sin* of this man was unbelief; not the unbelief of any threatening, but the unbelief of a promise.

We see then, brethren, that we have before us a sin of very common occurrence; one that is committed every day, and committed, not only by the infidel and scorner, but by persons who manifest some regard for the gospel, and some reverence for God. Unbelief of the divine pro-

mises is as common here, as it was in Samaria; as common perhaps in this church, as in the palace of Jehoram.

Take, first, the case of *the young*. You are seeking happiness, looking eagerly around you for something that will quiet and satisfy a restless heart. God speaks to you from heaven. He says, "My ways are ways of pleasantness, and all my paths are peace." He makes known to you the gospel of his Son, tells you of the unsearchable riches of his grace, and says, "Here is blessedness; here is rest." Now do you believe him? The greater part of you must answer "No;" for how do you act? At the very time when the Lord is telling you that there is happiness in religion, and offering to you that religion which will make you happy, you turn your backs on him, and say in his hearing to every trifler who comes in your way, "Who will shew us any good?"

And look at *the anxious and care-worn*. You have families to provide for; children to support, and watch over, and guide. You are careful and troubled about them. The Lord speaks to you also. He says, "Take no thought for the morrow. Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure. Leave thy children to me. Every hair of their head is numbered." "We believe this," you say. Why then, brethren, this

load of care? Why so many restless nights and feverish days? Why such dark anticipations of future evils, and so much sinking of the heart at the prospect of the days to come? Could you at times be more fearful, if there were not a God in the heavens, or a Bible in the land?

The complaining too are equally guilty in this thing. God tells you in the scriptures that he directs all your affairs, and directs them in infinite wisdom and love—so wisely and so graciously, that not a single event could be altered without doing you mischief. “All things,” says he, “work together for good to them that love me.” But let the hour of trial come; let losses and disappointments befall you; let sickness lay waste your body, and enfeeble your mind; let your children die, and your friends desert, and the world wrong you;—what is your language? “All these things are against me.”

Turn also to *the convinced sinner*. Your eyes have been opened. The Holy Spirit has shewn you your guilt and your danger. You feel that whatever others may be, you are sinful, perishing, and undone. Now while in this state, Christ addresses you. He assures you that his “blood cleanseth from all sin,” that “whosoever believeth in him shall not perish.” “Come now, and let us reason together,” saith the Lord; “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as

snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Indeed what is the whole Bible, but one grand exhibition of mercy for such as you? What is the redemption it proclaims? A redemption purchased for the lost. What is the grace it displays? A remedy for their ills. What is the heaven it unfolds? A world prepared for their enjoyment.

Whence then arise these doubts of the Redeemer's mercy? Whence come all your long cherished suspicions of the extent and freeness of his grace? Why is one of you saying, "There is no mercy for me?" and another, "I can never be pardoned: I am lost?" Do these fears spring from humility? No; from unbelief; from a proud reasoning which contradicts God's word, and gives the lie to the Holy One of Israel.

The same spirit of unbelief is at work in many other cases. Such of you as are afflicted, and say that of your afflictions there will never be an end; such as are tempted, and despair of finding any way of escape; such as have painful duties to fulfil, and tell us that they are too weak ever to perform them; they who are struggling with their corruptions, and are hopeless of a victory over them;—all these disbelieve the promises of heaven; they are all guilty of the sin of this Samaritan lord. They may not be guilty of it to the same extent as this man was; but their sin is

precisely of the same character. It is unbelief, and find it where we may, it is an offence against the Majesty of heaven.

II. But whence does all this unbelief proceed? What is it that makes this sin so common in all ages, and amongst men of such different characters? *Its causes* are many.

1. This is one of the most common—we see not *how the promise can be fulfilled*. No means for its accomplishment are visible.

“Whence,” asked this scoffing lord, “is this promised abundance to come? Will the stones of our wretched city produce it? Will the Syrians throw it over our walls? If we have it at all, it must fall, like the manna, from the clouds.” He could not see the least prospect of succour; he consequently treated the prediction of Elisha as false, as nothing better than a mockery of their woes.

And thus do our own foolish hearts often beguile us. We are reminded of some gracious promise. It exactly meets our case; it offers us the very mercy that we need. Why then do we not believe and embrace it? “It cannot,” we say, “be accomplished. No help can reach us. Every way of deliverance is closed. We must be left to suffer and mourn;”—and why? Because the Lord does not send down an angel from

heaven, to shew us the path in which succour is coming ; because our feeble eyes cannot pierce the clouds which conceal a descending God from our view.

2. Others find a different reason for their despair. It springs from the extremity of their case. "Our condition," they say, "is desperate. It is, in its own nature, incapable of relief. Nothing can help or comfort us." In this instance, we disbelieve the promise of Jehovah because *we lose sight of the greatness of his power.*

No state could be more wretched than that of Samaria at this time ; none could appear more hopeless. So extreme was the distress, that, in the preceding chapter, we find two mothers actually agreeing to slay their infants for their mutual support. Their enemies too were as near the city as ever, and as numerous and strong. How was it possible then, that one short day could bring to these famished people cheapness and abundance ? The thing seemed impossible. So this nobleman thought it. Nay, he speaks as though he doubted whether God himself could bring it to pass. "Behold," asks he, "if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be ?"

And how did Israel in the wilderness often reason ? Precisely as this Samaritan reasoned. The pillar of fire was throwing its miraculous light

around them ; the streams from the smitten rock were flowing at their feet ; the manna was in their hands ; and yet poor faithless Israel, in the midst of all these prodigies, was continually distrusting the omnipotence of Jehovah. "They believed not in God," says the psalmist, "and trusted not his salvation." "They spake against God." "They limited the Holy One of Israel." "They said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" "Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people?"

"Do we wonder at this folly? It is nothing more than a picture of our own. Lift up your eyes on high. Is any thing too hard for the Lord who fixed that sun in the heavens, and caused the stars to roll? "No," we answer; "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." And yet what are we daily hearing? "My guilt," says one, "never can be blotted out; it is so great." My heart no grace can cleanse," says another; "it is so desperately wicked, crowded with so many abominations, tainted to the very core." My soul can never again see comfort," says a third; "it is so sinking, so forlorn, so completely wretched." And then comes a fourth, telling us that there is no room for him in heaven, and still urging the same plea for his unbelief—his case is so desperate; he has wandered so very near to hell.

And where is all this said ? In a world where mercy has a thousand times triumphed over wrath, and grace over sin ;—in a world where the most guilty have been pardoned, the most ungodly sanctified, and the most miserable blessed ;—on the same earth, from which Manasseh and David were taken to heaven ; where a malefactor, in the agonies of death, was made meet for paradise ; where the blasphemer Paul honoured his Lord more than any who went before or followed after him, and was at the same time the most afflicted of the sons of men, and the happiest. And by whom were all these wonders wrought ? By the very God at whose feet we lie down in despair ; by the very Redeemer whose grace, we say, cannot purify us, whose Spirit cannot comfort, and whose blood cannot save us.

Whence does this folly spring ? Its source is but too plain. We throw a veil over the glory of Jehovah ; we make our thoughts his thoughts, and our ways his ways ; we strip him of the strength of heaven, and clothe him in the weakness of earth. Nay, it is not always the great God, the only living and true God, whom we set before us. It is often a being of our own creation. We form a god for ourselves. And he is like ourselves, poor in his greatness, and mean in his power, and narrow in his mercy. We put him on an imaginary throne ; we call him by

the name of the Lord ; we then ascribe to him the glorious promises of the gospel ; and what must necessarily follow ? We feel at once that he is not equal to the performance of them ; we disbelieve and reject them. Abraham was “strong in faith.” If we ask why, the apostle tells us ; “Being fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able also to perform.” Our faith is weak, because we conceive God to be weak. We imagine him like the idols of men, without an ear to hear or a hand to save.

To these two causes then the unbelief recorded in this history must be traced. This Samaritan lord could discover no way by which the prediction of Elisha could be fulfilled ; he forgot the mighty power of the God in whose name the prophet spake ; he therefore laughed him to scorn.

III. Let us go on to consider *his punishment*. This was prompt and awful.

We have now before us a promise and a threatening. Not a man in Samaria could tell how either could be fulfilled. But the great God is never at a loss for means to accomplish his designs, whether they be designs of mercy or of wrath. The Syrians themselves shall furnish to Israel the abundance he has promised. “In the twilight,” early the ensuing night, so early that the Lord seems impatient to vindicate the honour

of his insulted servant, a noise in the air, as of horsemen and chariots, is heard in the camp of Benhadad. His troops conclude that an army is coming to the rescue of Samaria. "Lo," said they, "the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." Struck with a sudden panic, they fled, leaving behind them in their tents all their treasures and provisions. Their flight was soon discovered by four lepers. These carried the joyful tidings to the city, and in a few short hours, the event which seemed impossible, is come to pass; the greatest plenty succeeds to the greatest want. "A measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord."

And now where is this unbelieving chief? The unlooked-for abundance is come, and the predicted judgment shall follow it. As might have been expected, the news brought by the lepers, occasioned a rush to the gate which led from the city to the deserted camp. This very lord was appointed to preserve order in it. It followed therefore, that if there were any one person in the city, who was sure to enjoy the newly acquired plenty, he was that man. No provisions could enter the town without passing before his eyes; he was on the very spot where the booty would be sold. But he "never ate thereof."

And how was this? No disease robbed him of appetite; no message from the king hurried him away from the scene of plenty. There is something more in the prophet's threatening, than meets the ear. It is a sentence of death. And the very means which seemed certain to defeat, accomplished it. Hunger made the people eager; they rushed to the gate where this lord stood; he was thrown down in the struggle, and "the people trod upon him in the gate, and he died." Twice is his death recorded; twice does the Holy Spirit bid us mark it. And what do we learn from it? That the punishment of unbelief is sure, is great, is beyond expectation dreadful. In its nature it is two-fold.

I. *It loses the promised mercy.* Thus, for instance, the young cannot be persuaded that the gospel can make them happy: they consequently lose that happiness which the gospel brings. The void within them still aches. Their whole life is the chasing of a phantom; their joy, a feeding on ashes. They call it pleasure, but we know, and they know, that this is the sum of it all, "vanity and vexation of spirit."

You tell the afflicted, that God is "a very present help in trouble;" that in the darkest hour he can comfort; that in the wildest storm, he can say, "Peace," and there shall be a great calm. They believe you not. The consequence is, they

are still afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." Their days do they "consume in vanity, and their years in trouble."

And turn to the real Christian. Ask him why it is that his harp is on the willows; why all his hopes are clouded and his joys departed. Ask him why his corruptions triumph, and his graces languish. Ask him why losses fever, and the lightest afflictions depress, and a breath troubles him. The man once trod, like Peter, on the billows; ask him why he now begins to sink on the quiet waters. One reply meets all these questions—he has lost sight for a time of the divine promises. Unbelief has paralyzed his soul; he cannot lay hold of a single blessing.

2. But this loss is not all which this sin has to bear; *it brings down a positive punishment*. While it loses mercy, it incurs wrath. This will be greater or less according to the nature of our unbelief, the truth which it rejects, and the indulgence we give it. It may be the occasional and bewailed infirmity of a Christian heart. In this case, its punishment will be bitter, but not fatal. It may be the determined and cherished sin of an evil heart; it may fasten on "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," and refuse to give credit to the testimony which God has given of his Son. It is then ruinous; its consequences are tremendous and eternal. "He that believeth not the

Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

And not only does the unbeliever perish, he perishes, under the gospel, on account of his unbelief. As our salvation is ascribed to faith, rather than to any other grace ; so our ruin is ascribed to unbelief, rather than to any other sin. "He that believeth not is condemned already ;"—and why ? "Because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." Look at Israel in the wilderness. They murmured ; they rebelled ; they bowed down to idols ; they fell into the most abominable iniquities. But why were they excluded from the promised land ? The Holy Spirit passes over all their other crimes, and finds the cause of their destruction in their unbelief alone ; "To whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not ? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

But we must look into another world, if we would see the divine displeasure against this sin in its true light. The transactions of the great day of judgment will make it plain.

You think perhaps, brethren, that the punishment of this Samaritan lord was severe ; but, compared with the vengeance still in reserve for the unbelieving, it was nothing ; nothing when compared with the execution of this sentence, "He

that believeth not, shall be damned.” And yet there is severity enough in the end of this man, to make some of us tremble. For disbelieving one promise, for one scoffing speech, he lost his life. Some of you perhaps go much farther than this. You disbelieve every promise and every threatening; you have been scoffing at the gospel of God, the servants of God, all your life long. What then will be your latter end? If you die as you have lived, it will be this—in the great day of the Lord, you will hear the invitation that calls the blessed of the father to his kingdom, but you will be bidden to depart accursed. You will “see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God,” but it will be afar off; you will be cast out. “Write,” said he who sat on the throne, to his apostle John, “for these words are true and faithful—the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.”

The first truth then which we learn from this history, is *the guilt of unbelief*. There must be something inconceivably criminal in that which forfeits so much good, and gives birth to so much misery. We may judge of its nature by its effects. And yet what a trifle do we esteem it! We hear in our own houses of theft, or adultery, or murder. We startle at the sound of these

crimes. We ought to shrink from them. We then come to this house of God, The most gracious promises that ever came from the throne of heaven, are brought before us—without a pang or a sigh we reject them. And yet the contrite adulterer and murderer have been pardoned; the repentant thief has been forgiven. David is in heaven, and the converted malefactor went from his cross to paradise. But when was the impenitent unbeliever saved? Never.

And why all this peculiar displeasure against a sin in appearance so light? It dishonours God more than any other sin. Faith, we are told, “gives glory to God.” Unbelief robs him of his glory. It “makes him a liar.” It slights his goodness, it asperses his wisdom, it impeaches his sovereignty, it denies his power. There is not one of his perfections, at which it does not strike. And then it is the parent of every other sin. It keeps alive all our corruptions; it strengthens and covers them.

We are taught also here *the misery of unbelievers*. They are living now in a world of mercy. They hear too of greater mercies than any which the world affords; of mercies, such as angels in their innocence never received or perhaps thought of. But what is written on them all? “Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.” Is it not so, brethren? True, the

sun does shine on you ; you breathe the air of God, and take, with others, the common bounties of his providence ; but as for spiritual mercies, the mercies which quiet, and fill, and transform the soul—the love of the Father, communion with Christ, the joy of the Holy Ghost—mercies worthy of an immortal spirit to receive, and worthy of an everlasting God to give—what do you know of them ? You hear of them all, but you have never yet tasted the blessedness of one. And what has kept them from you ? Unbelief. They have all been offered to your acceptance, but you have either doubted their existence, or questioned the sincerity of the offer.

One truth more then is plain—*the necessity of watching against this guilty and miserable thing.*

The sin of which you have been hearing, is not the crime of a century or an age ; it is the sin of every hour. In the unsanctified heart, it is always reigning. It characterizes it. It stamps it with this name of reproach, “ an evil heart.” It is mixed up with every movement of the soul, and every action of the life.

In the renewed mind, it has been dethroned, but it is yet there. Subtle, long lived, clinging, it is that of which the sinner is last convinced, and which the Christian last conquers. Hear the penitent transgressor speak of his iniquities. He confesses with tears almost every other sin that

fallen man can commit: of the greatest of all, of unbelief, he says not a word.

How jealous then ought we to be of ourselves! How suspicious of our unbelieving hearts! Look within, brethren. Is there no secret distrust of God harboured there? no low thoughts of his mercy, no hard thoughts of his justice, no degrading thoughts of his power? Is the promise, is the oath of Jehovah always able to keep our minds quiet in danger, and calm, though sorrowful, under a sense of guilt? We can trust one another. There are some of our fellow-worms, on whose veracity we could almost stake our life. Do we always as simply and fully trust the God who cannot lie, the Saviour who bled for us, and the Spirit who comforts us? We are verily guilty.

Ought this thing so to be? Ought it not to cover us with humiliation and shame? It grieves our best and dearest Friend more than any other wound we ever gave him; he complains of it more. It made him weary when on earth, of the disciples whom he had chosen. He complained not of their worldly-mindedness or of their pride; he bore without a murmur their base desertion of him; but their unbelief caused him to wish himself far away from them. "O faithless generation," said he of those very men whom he loved as he loved his own soul, "how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"

Nay, this was one of the most bitter ingredients in his cup of woe—"he came unto his own, and his own received him not;" he offered salvation to the perishing, and they refused it.

This is unbelief, brethren. It robs us; it dishonours God; it wastes mercy; it excites wrath; it rivets fast on us the woes of earth; it fills hell; it wounds him who shed his heart's blood to heal us; it grieves the only Comforter of a wretched world. Shall we love it? Shall we hold it fast? No. How shall we act? Look at the father who came to Jesus for help for his troubled son. He heard the Saviour's touching lamentation over the unbelief of his disciples. He heard the words addressed to himself, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." And then how did he act? He left us an example which ought to shame us. "Straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

SERMON VIII.

THE FUNERAL AT THE GATE OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 12.

Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

THE Bible is like the world—we cannot look into it without meeting with the traces of human misery. But this is not all we discover. The compassion of heaven is as visible and as great. It is greater. Man can suffer much ; he does suffer more than it might have been expected so feeble a worm could find strength to bear ; but what is the mercy we see and feel ? More than angels can understand ; more perhaps than they once conceived an infinite God could shew.

We see this mercy in one of its most attractive forms in the history before us. We must however look first at the scene of distress which drew

it forth. And to this scene, our attention, for the present, must be confined. The use I purpose to make of it, is simply this—to remind you of the designs of God towards ourselves, in those extraordinary afflictions with which we sometimes behold an individual or a family visited.

In the preceding verse of the chapter, Jesus is described as drawing near with a multitude to the gate of Nain, a little city at the foot of mount Hermon. Another multitude meets him there. “Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.”

And are these few words all that Saint Luke can spare for a case of suffering like this? There was too much suffering in it for him to say more. Deep grief will not admit of a long description: it must be felt to be understood. The sacred historians knew this. Experience had taught it them. It had taught them also how to speak of misery. We sometimes wonder what it is that makes their short and simple narratives so very touching. It is often no more than this—the men who wrote them, were men of sorrows. They reach the heart, because they speak the language of nature, of feeling, and of truth.

But mournful as this scene appears, it does not stand alone, without a parallel, in the history of human woe. Most of us have witnessed similar calamities. We have seen God laying his hand

on a family, as though he had singled it out for a spectacle of misery. We have seen him inflicting on it stroke after stroke; sending its members one after another in quick succession to the tomb, till at length hardly one is left to shed a tear for the rest. We have seen the once happy parent made childless; the once flourishing neighbour stripped bare of all his comforts; the man who was once surrounded with "lovers and friends," moving over the scenes of his former joys solitary and forlorn.

Now this does not happen by chance. It is the work of that God, without whom not a sparrow falls. He does it for our good—to warn us, to make us think and feel, to teach us lessons which, in the midst of friends, and ease, and prosperity, we refused to learn. If we ask what these lessons are, this funeral will point them out to us.

I. Look, first, at that *breathless corpse*. "Behold, there was a dead man carried out."

The Jews always buried their dead without the walls of their cities. They are now coming out of Nain to follow to his grave one cut off from among them in his youth and strength. And why was he thus snatched away?

1. To teach them and us *the dreadful nature of sin*. When old men die, we almost forget why they die. We look on them as worn out, and re-

gard their death as nothing more than the natural termination of past years of labour and sorrow. But when the young die, we are forced to remember what death really is. We cease to talk of nature. The awful truth comes out—death is the work of sin. It is what the scripture calls its “wages.” It is what we get for loving and serving sin so well.

We may not think of this truth, brethren, when the children of our acquaintance or neighbours die; but we shall think of it when the blow comes nearer home. What were Adam’s thoughts when he first saw Abel lifeless on the ground? Was it nothing more than the loss of one son and the cruelty of another, which shook that wondering man? No. The scene that had past long ago in paradise, flashed upon him; the threatening of heaven rang in his ears; he thought of sin, and trembled.

And where is the parent who has not trembled, as he has looked on the corpse of a beloved child? But a short while ago, all there was life and health, hope and joy; the heart gladdened as the eye beheld that once glowing countenance and that rising form. What is there before me now? Dear as it was to me, I shall soon be glad to bury it out of my sight. O how I hate the sin which has wrought such a change as this! O how I wonder that in a dying world, dying

men should make so light of it ! O how precious is that Redeemer who offers me salvation from such a curse !

2. Learn here too one lesson more—the truth you so often hear and find it so hard to credit—*None are too young to die.* This young man died. Those around him needed probably such a warning. Your friends and neighbours also may need a blow. A God of mercy may send it them. And how ? By opening a grave for you. What if it should be so ? Are you ready ? Are you prepared to go from this church to your bed, and from your bed to your tomb ? If, before another sabbath comes, we lay your dead body in the earth, where will your soul be ? We know that it will be in eternity ; but will it be lost or saved there ; happy or wretched, with Satan or with God ?

II. The evangelist now calls our attention to another object. This young man had *a mother*, and she is now weeping near his corpse. But this is not all ; she had wept for another before she wept for him. “She was a widow.” There are widows still, and some as desolate as this poor sufferer. And why are they left amongst us ? Why are they kept in a world, from which all that made that world pleasant to them, is departed ?

1. They are living witnesses of *the uncertain hold which we have of all our earthly comforts.*

It is marvellous how prone we are to lose sight of this simple fact. Some of us never think that our children and our friends are mortal. Even when sickness comes, when the stroke of death is plain to others, we cannot see it; the thing appears so unnatural, so strange. Who are the last that expect the sick to die? In almost every instance, they who love them most. But when the work is done, then we awake. One friend is gone; we see that others too may go. We leave one child in the grave; and then we look around to discover in our remaining children the seeds of disease and the forerunners of corruption.

And if we are wise, we stop not here. Our language now is, "Why did I lean for happiness so long on what I could not keep? Why do I still bind so closely to me the objects which death may tear from me in an hour? I will strive to wean this bleeding heart of mine from a dying world. I will not love it as I have done. I will seek my comforts in things which death cannot reach. I will not rest in any thing below my God." O that the sufferings of others could teach all of us this language! Force not God to teach it you, brethren, in the bitter way in which many learn it. Have you children? Have you friends? Be thankful for them; they are lent you to be valued and enjoyed; but think of Job, think of Naomi, think of this Jewish wife and mother.

Your mercies are fading, dying mercies. They may be gone so unexpectedly and so suddenly, that though you see them go, their loss may seem to you for a time like the illusion of a dream. And the more you love them, the more likely you are to lose them. It is the gourd of which we are "exceeding glad," that earliest withers. It is the dearest friend, the most beloved, the only child, that soonest dies.

2. The son over whom this widow wept, had evidently been very dear to her. But a short time before, she had probably leaned on him as her prop, and rejoiced in him as her solace. All the happiness she knew, came from him; and all the comfort she expected, she looked for from him alone. What does she find him now? A source of the keenest misery.

As it was with her it may be with us—*Our dearest earthly comforts may become the occasions of our heaviest sorrows.* Before they go, they are sometimes embittered to us; we wish that we had never seen them. And what if their sweetness continue to the last? It will only inflict on us at the last a sharper pang. We shall lose them; lose them perhaps when, like this widow, we most need them; when we are clinging to them, as if we thought the world without them were a blank.

Perhaps we have already made the discovery; if not, we shall all sooner or later learn, that our

severest griefs spring from the objects we love the best; that whatever brings joy to the heart, will in the end bring sorrow also. The fault is not in the things themselves; it is in us, in our own earthly hearts. We love the creature too well; we put it above our God; and this is the way in which he casts it from its throne. He suffers the reed we lean on to pierce us as it breaks; he allows the idol which drew our affections from him, to wound as well as fail us; and then our eyes are open. Our misery brings us to ourselves. We remember that none can satisfy the soul, but he who had power to create and was rich enough to ransom it. We turn away from our broken idols and withered gourds, and say with David, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee."

III. But this dead man and his weeping mother do not complete the mournful scene we are contemplating. There is a *multitude* near. "Much people of the city," we are told, "was with them."

We can be at no loss to discover the motive which brought them here. The Jews have ever been remarkable for the honours they pay to the dead, and for the compassion which they manifest for their surviving friends. Hence we find that when Lazarus died, "many of them came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning

their brother." And the sympathy which they shewed on these occasions, was of no ordinary kind ; for Saint John tells us that when Mary wept, the Jews also wept " which came with her." It was not likely then that such a people would be regardless of this desolate woman. Suspending their busy cares, the inhabitants of the city where she dwelt, follow her sorrowing to the burying place of her son. And as they follow her, they remind us of another end which signal calamities are designed to answer—they are intended *to call into exercise our compassion.*

You need not be told, brethren, that man does not always feel as he ought for his fellow-man. There are some hearts which seem insensible to pity, and there are times when even the tenderest heart is cold. Our neighbours die, and we have hardly a sigh to give them as we see them passing to their graves ; our friends suffer, and we leave them to weep alone. Our own families, our own cares, perhaps our own griefs, absorb all our thoughts. And yet though we heed not the miseries of our fellow-worms, there is One who never forgets them ; One who marks every tear they shed, and numbers all their pangs. We cannot see him ; but we may see his pity for the wretched in the commands which he has left us, that we should pity them. " This is my commandment," said he to the friends whom he was

about to leave in trouble, “that ye love one another;”—and how? “as I have loved you.” And when he sent down his Holy Spirit from heaven to teach them, his language was the same; “Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted.” “Bear ye one another’s burdens.” “Weep with them that weep.”

Neither does he deem these commands sufficient. He sometimes enforces them by his providence. He brings misery before us in such a form, that it triumphs over us. Our thoughtless selfishness gives way; the heart is forced to melt; for a time, at least, we feel as men. And thus the woes of earth are lightened, and our evil passions checked. A kindness received in affliction is seldom lost. Its influence is often great and lasting. It binds man to man. Though but a word or even a look of pity, it has been the beginning of a long and deep affection, and sometimes of an eternity of love. Our best friendships are generally formed in the hour of trouble; and it is then also that our bitterest enmities are subdued.

IV. There is yet a fourth object of attention in this melancholy throng. *The Lord Jesus Christ* draws near and joins it. And O what a joyful change in it did his presence make! We must not however turn away from the misery he relieved.

Connecting it with him, we learn that *great sufferings are often designed to bring honour to him who sends them*, to manifest the glorious perfections of the great Lord of all. This was the chief end why this young man died and this widow mourned. We are accordingly told that before Jesus left them, all this assembled multitude “glorified God.” How this effect was produced in this instance, the sequel of this history will inform us. It was the result of a wonderful display of love and power. In other cases of affliction, the blessed Saviour manifests the glory of other perfections of his divine character.

1. We see in some of them *his fearful holiness*. There is sin in a family, great sin, perhaps known, open sin. “I will visit their transgression with the rod,” says the Lord, “and their iniquity with stripes.” The promised scourge comes. Calamities, sickness, death, proclaim the displeasure of a holy God. Thus was old Eli dealt with. “His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” The Lord slew them; and scarcely had the ears of their father tingled at the news, when he fell down and died. “Thou hast given,” said Nathan to David, “great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.” And how did the Lord silence their blasphemies? He first struck the infant that was dearest to the monarch’s heart, and then came blow after

blow on David's house, and made it a proverb on the earth.

Sometimes the iniquity is secret. The world sees in the chastisement nothing more than the hand of an afflicting Father; but it is not sorrow only, which bows that mourner down. His "sin has found him out." He sees in the desolation around him, in lost comforts and opened graves, an avenging God. There is a sting within the man. While others tell him of a Father's pity and a Saviour's love, there is a louder voice sounding in his ears, "I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth." "O do not this abominable thing which I hate."

2. But peculiar afflictions are not always the effects of peculiar sins. "Master," said the disciples to Jesus, "who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." And this is the way in which the Lord sometimes makes himself manifest in the depths of trouble—he shews us *the supporting and conquering power of his grace*.

Where can we find on earth a nobler monument to the Redeemer's praise, than in the house of mourning? A child of the dust "stricken of God and afflicted," stripped of all that upholds

and gladdens his fellow-men, and yet not sinking, unhurt, calm ; feeling the weight of sorrow even more than others feel it, but not cast down by it ; triumphing over feeling ; reigning the lord of griefs, which have fired the brain and broken the heart of thousands ; kissing the rod which wounds him, and even blessing the hand which holds it ;—brethren, this is a victory which none but a believer in Christ can attain, and nothing but his almighty grace can give. It is the most glorious spectacle that is seen on earth ; and no place but the earth affords it. It is not found in heaven ; it is not even heard of in hell. The Bible however is continually displaying it. That sacred book is one long, crowded record of the triumphs of a Saviour's grace over the woes of man. And the history of the church, in every age, exhibits the same triumphs. Not an earthly trouble can we think of, which this grace has not overcome. Nay, it has upheld many a sufferer, even when a sense of guilt has combined with outward trials to sink him into despair. He may not, with the blameless Paul, have rejoiced in abounding tribulation, for a wounded conscience knows no joy ; but, with righteous Job, he has blessed the name of the Lord who has made him desolate. The guilty David, under a stroke which, he says, “consumed” him, was “dumb,” submissive. And think again of Eli. The judgments with which

he was threatened, were appalling. None but a Christian father who has groaned over the loss of an ungodly child, can understand them. Yet what is that old man's answer? "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."

Let us turn now from the gate of Nain to ourselves. Have the things we have seen and heard made any impression on us? Does sin appear to us more fearful, than we thought it an hour ago? Shall we leave these walls more mindful of death, than we were when we entered them? As we look on our children and friends, are we more ready to look on them as fading comforts, as blessings which our abuse of them may turn into scourges? Have we felt here one throb of pity, or put up a single prayer for one afflicted soul? We have heard of the holiness of Christ; have we stood in awe of it? We have heard of his triumphant grace; has our prayer been, "Bless me, even me also, O my Father?" Alas, brethren, with a suffering and dying world before us, how easy is it to give instruction, but how difficult to get these hearts of ours practically affected by it! The tidings of deaths, and funerals, and afflictions, reach us every day; we do not hear of them with total unconcern; but where is their fruit? Look for it in the parish which these things have overspread with sadness—you look in vain. Go for it to the

house which they have turned into a house of sorrow—you cannot find it. Unveil the very heart which they have torn the most—it is not even there. And why is this? We have not called upon God. We forget the desperate wickedness of our hearts; we forget their hardness. Either we care nothing about the matter, or we trust to afflictions, and warnings, and judgments, to accomplish a work which nothing short of omnipotence can perform. The consequence is, the work is not accomplished; we are the very men we ever were. We behold affliction, and we ourselves endure it; we move about among the suffering, the dying, and the dead; but nothing changes us. The great God still comes seeking fruit, and he finds none.

It is an awful truth, that suffering never can convert the soul; no, not even when that suffering is our own. Take from amongst ourselves the man of the liveliest feeling and the tenderest heart; rob him of every earthly blessing; put “lover and friend far from him, and his acquaintance into darkness;” heap on his head all the calamities which man, in his wretchedness, ever bore;—what have you done? Have you brought him near to God? Have you forced him to seek grace and rest in Christ? No; you have wrung his heart, but you have not changed it. Not one right, one holy feeling have you excited.

It is a broken heart perhaps, but yet an earthly, sensual, evil one.

Our need of the special grace of the Holy Ghost is plain and urgent. Nothing can be done without it. The scripture tells us so. Our own experience confirms the testimony. It follows then that we must pray or perish. We must cease to trust in the temporary impressions which the sight of death or the anguish of tribulation can make. We must seek the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit ; we must trust in the grace of the living God.

Go then and beseech him to work effectually in you. Implore him to turn away your eyes from beholding vanity ; to make you feel that all you love and see is passing away, that death is certain and near, that you will soon be in the same world whither the dead are gone, that none can make you happy there but Christ, that none but Christ can save you from destruction. Once united by a living faith to him, justified by his righteousness and cleansed by his Spirit, all things will "work together for your good." The sufferings of others will teach you how to suffer ; your own will "turn to your salvation" and your Redeemer's glory. The death of friends will be made the means of preparing you to die ; and what, brethren, will your own death do for you when it comes ? It will admit you into a world of light, and life,

and joy ; a world in which there is no sickness, no pain, not a tear nor a grave ; a world in which, for the first time, you may say, “ I am safe, I am free, I am blessed.”

SERMON IX.

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST FOR THE WIDOW
OF NAIN.

ST. LUKE vii. 13.

*When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her,
and said unto her, Weep not.*

THE sacred historians seldom tell us what Christ felt. Their business lay with his wonderful actions and gracious words, rather than with his feelings. Whenever therefore they mention any particular effect produced on his mind by passing circumstances, we may be sure that there is something remarkable in that effect; something which is worthy of our close attention, and was intended to arrest it.

He had now a funeral before him. “Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” Our Lord

could not behold with indifference such a scene as this. In a mind like his, it must have excited many and strong emotions. One only is mentioned. It is compassion. Concerning this, we find these four particulars recorded;—its nature, its object, the cause which drew it forth, and one of the effects which it produced.

I. Consider *its nature*. The original word implies that it was deep and tender; not that slight movement of pity with which we are affected, when we hear of the sorrows of a neighbour; but the lively and strong feeling which agitates our hearts, when we look on the sufferings of a friend or a child. It is more than a feeling for the wretched; it is a feeling with them.

We often ascribe such compassion as this to God. We are warranted to do so. The scripture has done so before us. “His soul,” we are told, “was grieved for the misery of Israel.” “In all their afflictions,” says Isaiah, “he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them.” But we dare not give to this language its strict and full meaning. The great God cannot be affected as we are. He can know nothing of human passions and human infirmities. And yet we are taught that the Lord Jesus Christ has known and experienced them all. His soul has been “exceeding

sorrowful;" he has been "moved with compassion;" he has "wept."

Here then we come to the first cheering truth which this history confirms—the *real and complete manhood of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Few of us think enough of this. We are told that he "was made man;" we believe the amazing fact; but then we generally confine our view of his manhood to the mere form he took on him, to the body in which he suffered and died. But the scripture goes much farther. It speaks of him as a man within as well as without; as possessing a human soul as well as a human frame; as being as truly and experimentally acquainted with human feelings, sin only excepted, as any one of ourselves.

It tells us too why this human soul and these human feelings were given him. It was for a most wonderful and gracious purpose—that he might carry them up with him when he went to his lofty throne, and feel, like a brother, in heaven, for those whom he has left in tribulation on earth. This is Saint Paul's account of the matter; "It behoved him to be made in all things like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."

We lose nothing then by the high exaltation of

the Son of man. Our misery can reach him at the right hand of his Father, just as quickly as this widow's reached him when he was by her side at Nain; it can move his heart as deeply. It cannot indeed disquiet his soul, as the sight of misery disquieted him in the days of his flesh; he no longer weeps and is troubled; but it affects him as much. Nay, it affects him more. His human soul is now "made perfect;" its powers are enlarged. Its compassion is consequently deepened, increased. Nothing is gone but its pain and weakness. It is a father's pity, without its imperfection; it is a mother's love, softened and heightened by the love of heaven.

II. Pass now from the nature of this compassion, to *its object*. This was not the dead man who was carried out, though he was cut off in the strength of manhood: it was his surviving mother.

1. Learn here then that *the objects of our Lord's compassion are the living*. They whom he pities, are not to be found in heaven or in hell. We must look for them only in our own world. And where shall we go in order to find them here? To our churchyards? To our vaults and graves? No; to our churches, our houses, our homes.

2. Learn also that *our grief for the dead must not stand in the way of our compassion for the living*.

We weep for the dead. Let nature speak, and we should all say that we do well to weep for them, especially when death comes suddenly upon them in the days of their youth. O what a strange and melancholy change have they experienced ! Instead of the cheerful light of day, the unbroken darkness of the grave for ever covers them. They are alone, solitary there. Their only companion is the worm. All their earthly hopes have died, and their expectations perished. But the dead need no pity. Every tear which nature makes us shed for them, is lost.

If they died the enemies of God, we are called to a harder work than mourning and weeping. Now is the time when all the corruptions of our fallen nature will try their strength. Satan will "come in upon us like a flood." No hour perhaps is so much his hour as this ; never is the power of darkness more fearful. Left to themselves, every movement of our souls will be an accusation against the King of heaven ; every thought, rebellion. We shall be as blasphemous as though we ourselves were lost, and almost as wretched. In such a perilous situation, we have neither time nor strength for useless sorrow. Our own hearts require our care. Our business is not to mourn, but to "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God," to tremble and be still.

If they whom we have lost, are safe with Christ ;

have we not more reason to envy than to pity them? Put the question to yourselves—Which is more the object of grief, a ransomed sinner caught up into heaven out of this troublesome world, or you who are left behind amidst its sorrows?

You say perhaps, with the agitated David, “Would to God I had died for them!” But pause for a moment. Ask yourselves another question—Were it in your power, would you take them from the blessedness of Jehovah’s house, and give them in exchange for it the pangs which their loss has occasioned you? the forlornness, the desolation, which is now overspreading your heart? The thought is a cruel one. Hear then the language of the prophet; “Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him.” And what would be the language of your buried friend, could he speak to you from his glorious rest? “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves.” “If ye loved me, ye would rejoice.”

Your feelings are roused, brethren. Waste them not in the indulgence of a compassion which is not needed. Give them a new direction. Let your surviving friends, let a suffering world, let millions of thoughtless and dying men, let your own poor soul, have more of your love and pity. You cannot add to the joys of heaven, but you may lessen the woes of earth. It is your duty to

lessen them ; and that grief for the dead is neither Christian nor right, which hinders you for any long time from helping the living.

We have seen then the nature of our Lord's compassion—it is a lively pity, a deep and tender sympathy. We have seen also its objects—they are the men who are now alive on the earth. And here a question arises—How may we obtain for ourselves this divine compassion? How may we get within its reach? The text answers this question.

III. Consider *the cause* which drew forth the Saviour's pity.

This widow was not the personal friend, nor yet a follower of our Lord ; at least, she is not described as such. Neither did she ask him for his sympathy. It was simply the sight of her misery, which obtained it for her ; “ When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.” It might be that his thoughts were carried forward to a future and yet more distressing burial. In the anguish he now witnessed, he saw perhaps an image of that sword which would soon pierce through the soul of another parent. The hour of his own departure was not far distant. He thought of his own beloved mother weeping over his own mangled frame, and his soul was moved.

Be this as it may, we may fairly come to this

conclusion—*The sympathy of Christ is as free as his grace.* It takes its rise out of the very same love that nailed him to the cross. It may be obtained on terms as gracious, as the mercy which saves the soul. It wants nothing to place sinners within its reach, but misery. The objects of it are all the wretched.

I do not say, brethren, that the Lord Jesus Christ felt for this widow, as he would have felt, under similar circumstances, for one of those faithful women who followed him in his wanderings; or as he actually did feel for the afflicted Martha and Mary “whom he loved;” or as he might have felt for this widow herself, had she supplicated his pity. He loves them that are his, as he loves none other; he “manifests himself unto them as he does not unto the world;” and as for the prayer of the sorrowful, it calls into exercise his tenderest mercy. But let us not limit the grace which knows no bounds. Are you suffering? It matters not whence that suffering proceeds, you are already one of those whom Christ compassionates. There is not a sinner on the earth, who has not a measure of his compassion; no, nor a pang in any heart, with which he is not touched. Turn to the grave of Lazarus. What drew forth those groans and tears which came from the Saviour there? Not the loss of his friend simply. Four days before, he knew that

he was gone, and spake of his death with unbroken calmness. He wept because he could not look on misery without emotion, because the sufferings even of his bitterest enemies found their way to his heart. "When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled."

IV. We come now, in the fourth place, to look on this tender and free compassion in *its effects*. Of these, only one is recorded in the text. It manifested itself in words. These were only two. Jesus said unto her, "Weep not." Yet even these two short words seem at first unmeaning and useless. Our Lord could not intend to reprove a widowed mother for weeping at the funeral of an only son, nor could one simple sentence be expected to heal the grief from which her tears proceeded. What then was the design of this address?

1. We shall not greatly err, if we consider it as intended to shew us, first, *the earnest desire of the Saviour's heart for the consolation of the afflicted*; his readiness to comfort them.

In another minute, this widow's grief would come to an end. Our Lord knew this. He himself was about to turn it into joy. Yet he cannot, even for a few brief seconds, leave her to weep

unnoticed. The words of comfort drop, as it were involuntarily, from his lips. He said unto her, "Weep not." There is something very touching in this circumstance.

We know, brethren, that there is a glorious rest prepared for the people of God. We know too that they will soon enter into it. Now it might have been supposed that this was enough; that he who has prepared such a rest for them, and them for such a rest, might well leave them, for a few fleeting years, to bear, with their fellow-sinners, their full share of the griefs which are so soon to end. But no; they are sorrowful, and they must be comforted. Heaven when they die, is not enough; they shall have heavenly consolations while they live; and Christ himself will impart them.

Before he entered the world, this was his command to his prophet, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." When he appeared amongst us, he came "as the consolation of Israel." Hear him opening his own commission at Nazareth; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted." And look at him when his great tribulation was coming on. He shrunk from the prospect, but yet it could not keep his thoughts from the griefs of others. He

knew that though they would all forsake him, his loss would make his dear disciples sad, and he spent his last hours in preparing them for their approaching sorrow. "These things," said he, "have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." And when he left the earth, what was his last request to the friends who surrounded him? He tells them to "go into all the world," and carry comfort, "the gospel," glad tidings of great joy, "to every creature." If we follow him into heaven, he appears as a Comforter still. Not satisfied with filling the wide kingdom of the redeemed with joy, he speaks peace to them who are mourning here. The very Spirit whom he sends forth to lead them to himself, is appointed to make their hearts burn with joy in their way to him. And this is not all. Even when sorrow and crying shall be done away, when all his people are brought to heaven and not a grief can be found among them all, what is his language? It seems as though he could not bear the thought of ceasing from the work he loves. He speaks of himself as still employed in it. He "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

2. This saying of Christ may shew us also *his knowledge of the human heart.*

Deep grief will not bear many words. Reasoning is thrown away upon it. Offered in such a

form, comfort is worse than useless ; it wearies and oppresses. The fact is, that a severe sufferer cannot reason. He is alive to feeling only ; and it is by feeling that we must reach his heart. Reason with him, and though your words be wise as an angel's, they will do him no good. He will only say with another harassed mourner, " I have heard many such things. Miserable comforters are ye all." But shew the man compassion, and he understands your kindness. Feel for him and with him ; he thanks you, and is comforted.

Look at the friends of Job. They acted at first with a wisdom and tenderness, that make us love them. As soon as " they heard of all the evil that was come upon him, they came to mourn with him and to comfort him." And how did they proceed ? " They lifted up their voice and wept ; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads towards heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights ; and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

It was precisely in the spirit of these men, that our Lord acted towards this bereaved mother. " He had compassion on her." He said just enough to shew the feeling, and then was silent.

It was the same at Bethany. Martha meets the Saviour as he was drawing near to her afflicted

home. She was in sorrow. She loved her brother, and she mourned for him ; but she had not Mary's depth of feeling : her grief was calm. She addresses her Lord like one who could listen to consolation, and who wished for it. He accordingly speaks to her ; he reasons with and consoles her. But how different is his conduct towards the gentle Mary ! She hears from Martha, that he was come, at whose blessed feet she had often sat ; and with all the speed which love could give her, she rises up and runs to him. One sentence is all that her bursting heart will allow to come from her ; the next moment she is on the ground at his feet. Mark his conduct. He probably loved this woman more than he loved Martha : she loved him more ; she was more like him : but not a word of consolation does he offer her. He shews his love in another manner. He "groaned in the spirit ;" he "wept." And then, as though he could bear no more, as though he were impatient to end her anguish, he abruptly asks, "Where have ye laid him?" and calls the departed Lazarus from his tomb. If this, brethren, be not human feeling, and tender and refined human feeling, where shall we find it?

The Lord Jesus Christ knows the heart. He knows all its workings, and feelings, and windings. He knows it altogether. No peculiarity of disposition or of situation can hide one of its

thoughts from him. We cannot thus enter into each other's hearts. We are not all formed alike ; we do not feel alike ; we are not all affected in the same manner and degree, by the same circumstances. We therefore perplex one another. Our fellow-man seems strange to us, and we strange to him. But Christ can understand us all. He can fathom every heart to the very bottom of its sorrows. And why ? Because he knows by experience what is in man. There was laid on him the misery, as well as the iniquity of us all. He is acquainted with our griefs, because " he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ;" all our griefs and all our sorrows. Hear the apostle's statement of this truth ; " We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted," or troubled, " like as we are."

The subject we have thus considered, may be applied to many practical uses.

It shews us *the importance of a frequent remembrance of the Redeemer's manhood*. We are all born to trouble, brethren. However diversified our lots may be, every one of us will find in the end, that sorrow is his birthright. Now sorrow, when it is heavy and long continued, weakens the mind. It can be effectually relieved by God only, but its tendency is to render us less disposed

to lift up our hearts to God, less ready to call into exercise those principles which have been in ordinary troubles our support and solace. The great God seems so high above us, so distant from us, that we despair of reaching him. We say indeed, with Job, "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" but then we too often add, with desponding Zion, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." And yet, at this very time perhaps, we can talk of our griefs to a fellow-sufferer, and feel them lessened as we tell him of them.

Here then we discover the means by which we may hold communion with the God of heaven. Set him before you as the Son of man. Look on him as he appeared in mortal flesh, "a man of sorrows;" a man of deep experience in all the woes which can rack the heart; a man of the liveliest, tenderest, most intense compassion. Place him, as it were, by your side. Regard him as your "companion in tribulation." Like Enoch, walk with him. Like John, lean on his bosom. He is not ashamed to call his people brethren. O let them not be afraid to use him as a Brother and a Friend!

This scripture directs us also *where to go for compassion*. You are ready, brethren, to turn for it to earthly friends. Your hearts often ache for the sympathy of some fellow-worm. Which of

you has not said in his trouble, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me?" And what is their pity when you obtain it? You feel that it seldom reaches your case, that it never goes so far as your sorrows go. There is something in your grief, which you cannot make even your tenderest friend comprehend; something which you must bear alone.

These disappointments bid you look higher. They tell you that the earth cannot afford a wounded spirit the sympathy it craves. There is but One in all the universe, who can shew or feel it. He feels it already; he is prepared to shew it, ready to meet you as a Friend. He has endured much, that he might be qualified to have compassion on you. O that you could be prevailed on to make trial of his love! Hear his own gracious invitation; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you are heavy laden, no matter what the burden may be which weighs you down, this call is addressed to you. It may be true that you are not his followers, that you have never sought the cleansing of his blood, nor accepted his great salvation; it may be true that you have lived in ignorance of him all your days; but are you weary? are you burdened? are you oppressed? Then come to the Lord Jesus Christ for relief.

This widow was a stranger to him, yet “ he had compassion on her ;” why should he refuse to pity you ? If you have rejected him as a Saviour, do not reject him as a Friend. It would indeed be awful to be the objects of his mercy for a few short years, and then to endure his wrath for ever. But if you will not stretch forth your hand [for his richest blessings, go to him for his least. Any thing that brings you to his feet, brings you near the source of every mercy. None ever offered to him a single petition, but he received more than he sought. For six thousand years he has been wont to give more than either we desire or deserve. You may ask him only for the healing of a broken heart ; he may give you salvation for a lost soul. The consolation you receive may be the beginning of an eternity of joy.

They who make light of Christ, may see here *how gracious a Being they despise*. And all of us most assuredly make light of him, who refuse to avail ourselves of his love towards us. That respect cannot be sincere, which allows us to seek our happiness any where rather than in him, which sets no value on any of his mercies, which rejects him in every character that he assumes, treating with equal neglect his offers for eternity and for time.

It is not from infinite greatness only, that you are turning away, brethren. It is from infinite

kindness, and compassion, and grace ; from tenderness which exceeds that of the mother who bare you ; which you may search for elsewhere, through earth and heaven, and will never find.

Need I say that there is folly in your conduct ? O that there were nothing worse ! There is guilt in it, the deadliest guilt that can lie on the soul. And there is danger too. Insulted greatness is fearful, but despised love is tremendous. It is the sting of that worm which never dies, it is the fierceness of that flame which is never quenched. No wrath so dreadful as “the wrath of the Lamb ;” none more certain. It is coming on. Ere long it will triumph over the patience which now seems boundless, and rise above the compassion which nothing else can exhaust. “Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him.” Shall I say, “Lift up your heads with joy, for your redemption draweth nigh ?” Let me rather say, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ?” “He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy ; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ?”

SERMON X.

THE WIDOW'S SON RESTORED TO LIFE.

ST. LUKE vii. 14, 15.

He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him, stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak : and he delivered him to his mother.

WE often say that nothing teaches like affliction. Perhaps we are right. But affliction is not our only teacher. Mercy instructs, as well as sorrow. Indeed it is only when it leads to mercy, when it shews us our need of mercy, and makes us seek it, that sorrow does us any lasting good. The grand means which the Holy Ghost employs to relieve and bless wretched man, is love, a discovery of the abounding grace of God in Jesus Christ. It follows therefore, that signal mercies

have lessons for us, as well as signal calamities. Their errand is not done when they have gladdened us ; no, nor even when they have warmed our hearts with thankfulness. They are teachers sent from heaven, and, like afflictions, they will bear witness either for or against us at the judgment-seat of God.

A woman in deep affliction had arrested the notice of our Lord. She was a widow, and at the time he saw her, she was following to the grave an only son. His soul was moved with her misery. He paused for a moment to address to her two short words of kindness ; and then followed one of the most extraordinary displays of mercy, that ever brought glory to the living God. It is described in the text with admirable simplicity and force. So great indeed is the beauty of the apostle's narrative, that we are in danger of forgetting, in our admiration of it, that it was written for our instruction.

The subject which it offers for our meditation, is the relief which this distressed woman received in her affliction. We may consider this in five points of view ;—the time when she obtained it, the manner in which it was given her, the power which wrought it, the love which was displayed in its communication, and the effects which it produced in those who witnessed it.

I. Consider *the time* when her relief came. It was a time when she least expected it.

None but a parent can tell how hope clings to a parent's heart. A few days ago, a word of kindness from Christ, or even his presence, would perhaps have made this woman eager with expectation. He had healed many that were sick; with what imploring earnestness would she have besought him to heal her son! But now her case seemed hopeless. Her son was dead. His grave clothes were wrapped around him. The gate of the city was past. In another hour he would be closed up in his tomb. We accordingly find her silent; grateful perhaps for the pity shewn her by this strange Comforter, but neither imploring nor expecting his aid.

Learn here then this lesson—*Never think your case desperate*; never deem yourselves beyond the reach of help.

Some of us greatly need this caution. No sooner does grief come to us, than despair comes with it. We no more expect relief, than we expect the sun at midnight. But what does this history say? What do a thousand histories tell us? It is never too late for Christ to help us. On this side of eternity, not a spot can be found nor a situation thought of, where man need despair. There is no guilt which may not be pardoned, no evil which may not be cured, no darkness

which may not be turned into life and joy. Indeed, relief is generally the nearest to us, when our case appears the most desperate. It is God's way to delay his help, till all hope from every other source is gone.

No situation could be more perilous, than that of Israel in their departure from Egypt. Their destruction seemed inevitable. On one side of them rose Pihahiroth, a range of lofty cliffs; on the other side were the forts and garrisons of the Egyptians. Before them was a roaring sea; behind them, the enraged Pharaoh with his army and chariots. This helpless people gave themselves up to despair one hour, and saw in the next the salvation of God. Before another day had well begun, their enemies were overwhelmed in the waters, while they themselves were making the shore resound with their song of deliverance.

Lazarus of Bethany was sick. His sisters sent to Jesus a most touching message; "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest, is sick." But Jesus hastened not to his friend; "he abode two days still in the same place where he was." Lazarus died, and then at last said the Saviour, "I go." He went, and the buried Lazarus lived.

Even when his aid is earnestly sought, it is often for a time denied. It lingers. The wheels of his chariot tarry. Nay, while we are on our knees before him, our situation may become

darker, and our affliction heavier. Jairus had an only daughter. Like many an only child, she was struck by God. Her father trembled for her life. He flies in his anguish to Christ. He falls down at his feet, and "beseeches him greatly to come and lay his hands on his little daughter, that she may live." Jesus goes with him, but he moves not with a father's haste. He stops in his way to commend the faith of another sufferer, and while poor Jairus hears a healed woman bless him, his rising hopes are at once destroyed. There came one from his house, which said, "Thy daughter is dead." She was dead; and yet this very child, ere another hour had past, breathed and moved. "Her spirit came again, and she arose."

And why does the Lord act thus? For wise and gracious ends—to call us off from earthly confidence and lying refuges, to bring down the pride of our rebellious hearts, to lay us in conscious littleness and helplessness at his feet, to make us glorify his matchless wisdom when our deliverance comes.

II. He has often too the very same ends in view in the mode which he adopts to help us. Observe, secondly, *the manner* in which, in this instance, his aid was given. It came from a Being of whom nothing was expected, and in a way of which this afflicted woman never thought,

If she thought at all of comfort, she looked for it perhaps only in death, in joining her husband and her son, in going to them who could not come to her. Not one in all the multitude around her, expected Jesus of Nazareth to be her Comforter, much less her lost son to rise up from the dead to dry her tears.

Signal mercies seldom reach us in the way we look for them. The Lord generally draws near to us in an unexpected manner, as well as at an unexpected time. Israel, in the desert, were perishing with hunger ; their food came from the clouds. They were dying with thirst ; "He brought them forth water out of the rock of flint." And think of that greatest of all Jehovah's doings, the redemption of his church. Had men and angels sat in council to devise a plan by which lost sinners might be saved, could it ever have entered into their hearts to conceive of the incarnation of the Son of God ? of bringing him from the bosom of his Father, and placing him in degradation and misery in such a world as this ? And how have our own best mercies come ? And how are they daily coming ? From the friends on whom we have most depended ? Through the channels which we have thought must bring them ? No. All these have again and again failed us. They have been sent us by means of which we never dreamed. They have come in a way

which has filled us with wonder, while it has shewn us the hand and amazing greatness of our God.

III. Consider now *the power* manifested in the case before us.

In order to form a correct idea of this affecting scene, we must recollect that the mode of burial among the Jews was not precisely the same as among ourselves. The dead were not shut out from sight, when they were carried to the tomb. Their bodies were carefully wrapped in linen, and then laid on an open bier. Thus, after the resurrection of our Lord, we are told of the linen clothes and napkin that were left in his forsaken sepulchre, but not a word is said of any coffin. There was none.

And it is of importance in the instance before us, to bear this circumstance in mind. It proves this young man to be actually dead. The multitude saw him dead. His restoration to life was therefore a real, and not a pretended miracle.

Behold the Saviour then turning from the weeping mother to the corpse of her son. "He came and touched the bier." Awed by that countenance before which the earth and the heavens will one day flee away, "they that bare him, stood still." For a moment all is suspense and wonder; and then this compassionate Man takes on himself

the majesty and authority of God. "By his word the heavens were made," and now by the breath of his mouth he controls the dead. The silent multitude hear the command go forth, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise;" and before their wondering eyes, the dead obeys. Whence the spirit came, we know not: in a moment it was there, entering and animating its former clay. "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak." And what were his words? It is useless to ask. Let us rather enquire what ought to be our own. Are they not these? "Verily this man was the Son of God."

1. We have before us *a signal proof of the Redeemer's Godhead*. Others have raised the dead; but how? By means which plainly declared that the power they exercised, was not their own. Elijah, we are told, "cried unto the Lord" at Zarephath. Elisha "prayed unto the Lord," when he restored to the Shunamite her son. Peter "kneeled down and prayed," before he said to Tabitha, "Arise." Our Lord, on the contrary, acts like one who needs no assistance, who knows no limits to his power. He commands, and is obeyed; he speaks, and it is done. A word brings Lazarus from his sepulchre; a word raises this widow's son from his bier. Where is the mortal man who could thus perform such a work as this? Where is the angel who would dare at-

tempt it? The power which accomplished it, is the same which breathed into man at first the breath of life. The Being who exercised it, is the mighty God. What follows, brethren?

2. A second fact of which this miracle reminds us—the *ability of Christ to raise all the dead*. Nothing but omnipotence could restore life to one dead body; omnipotence can quicken whom it will. He who raised one, can raise a thousand, can raise a world. He can raise us. Look forward. When a few more years are gone, we shall all be in the situation of this young man; we shall be dead. Not a man of us will breathe the air or see the sun. Our friends will carry us out of the houses we now inhabit. We shall be left alone in the ground. And what will become of us there? We shall see corruption. This breathing clay, these bodies which we love so well, will be as the clods which cover them, vile earth and dust. And what if it be so? He that said to a sorrowful mother, “Weep not,” says to his dying saints, “Fear not. I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore; amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” If, when we die, we “die in the Lord,” this is the promise which he gives us to take with us to our graves, “He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I will raise him up at the last day.” The same voice

that reached this widow's son on his bier, can reach us in our beds of dust. It will be as powerful around this church, as in the gate of Nain. We shall hear it. We shall come forth and live.

3. We may discover also here *the power of Christ over the human soul*. When it has left the body, he can recall it at his will from its unknown abode. He can therefore reach it and control it while in the flesh. If he can by a word restore natural life, he can surely with as much ease restore spiritual life also.

Our souls are dead, brethren. Their spiritual and better life is gone ; they are "alienated from the life of God ;" they "are dead in trespasses and sins." The scripture tells us so. It discovers to us also the evil and danger of this state. It assures us that before we can see God, we must be raised out of it, "be born again," be "created anew ;" experience within us a change as real and as great, as the re-animation of a corpse. And how is this great change to be accomplished ? Only by "the working of that mighty power" which can raise the dead. If then any of you are mourning over your own dead souls, Christ is your life. Neither men nor angels can help you ; but this is your consolation, that he who said to this young man, "Arise," can work in you both "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

But you are mourning perhaps over the souls of others. While the sons and daughters of your neighbours go down to the grave, your own live before you, but they are not alive unto God. Their state is a grief and terror to you. Often does it force from you the cry of the supplicating patriarch, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" This miracle shews you in whom your hope lies. And in whom would you wish it to lie, rather than in him? Send your thoughts round all the beings you have ever seen or heard of—is there one among them all, of whom you would seek spiritual life for your child, rather than of this compassionate, this mighty Restorer of the dead? Invoke his aid. Expect it. Disquiet not yourselves because it is delayed. "In the evening time it shall be light." In an unexpected hour the prodigal may come to himself. He may fill your house and your heart with joy. You may say concerning him, "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

IV. But this miracle was not an act of mere greatness; it was also *a display of love*.

Often in the course of his ministry, our persecuted Lord was called on to assert his dignity by the exercise of his mighty power. Satan tempted

him to prove it by commanding stones to be made bread ; the Jewish rulers asked a sign from him ; Herod “hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.” He refused them all. He stood before his enemies, in appearance, powerless as themselves. But when this helpless widow wept before him, the glory of his Godhead burst forth ; he manifested his power in an act “to which none of the sons of the mighty can approach.”

And mark the tenderness of his love. This young man was now a living monument of his omnipotence, a proof of his divine authority which none could gainsay or resist. We might have expected therefore, that he would say to him, as he had said to others, “Follow me.” But no. He thought more of this widow’s comfort than of his own honour ; “He delivered him to his mother.”

What a scene was here ! A son, but a moment ago a senseless corpse, alive in a mother’s arms—a multitude dumb and motionless with wonder—the Man who had wrought this change, unmoved by its greatness ; calm ; looking with delight for a moment on the joy he had spread around him, and then passing away from it, like one who had higher and greater works to accomplish.

We cannot conceive aright of such a scene. We need not. We may however see in it *the*

approbation with which relative affection, the love of one relation to another, is viewed by Christ.

Our Lord never raised more than three persons from the dead. One was the only daughter of Jairus ; another, the only brother of Martha and Mary ; the third, the only son of his mother. And he raised them all in compassion to those who loved and wept for them. How could he say to parents and children, to brothers and sisters, how could he say to us all in stronger terms, "Love one another ?" How can we wish for mercies for our living children, and not seek them of him ? How can we mourn for the dead, and not remember that he pities us ? How can we hear of tenderness, and not think of Jesus Christ ?

V. *The effect* produced by this miracle was great. Nothing indeed is told us of the future conduct of the mother and her son. We may trust that the hour of their re-union was the beginning of a new life of praise. Could we look into heaven, we should doubtless see them at the feet of their mighty Lord, ascribing, not power and love only, but salvation to his name.

The surrounding multitudes were, for a time at least, deeply impressed. And here the Holy Spirit is not silent. The sensation excited among them, and the very words they uttered, are recorded. And why is this ? Probably to teach us

that *the mercies we witness are designed to affect us*, as well as the mercies we receive.

Our neighbours rejoice; we rejoice with them; but do we try to make the things which gladden them, testify to us of Christ? Do we hear him speaking to ourselves in them? Some of us perhaps might almost answer, "Never." We seldom think of going to the house of joy and health for instruction. Perhaps we love the house of mourning better. There may be something in the emotions it raises, and in the lessons it conveys, more in unison with our daily thoughts. This is not indeed a common state of mind. It is well that it is not; it is not a happy state. That, brethren, is the holiest heart, which dwells the most on the love of Christ, which prompts the tongue to sing of mercy oftener than of judgment, which looks for its Lord in the hourly discoveries of his goodness, as well as in the strokes of his wrath.

But what are the particular fruits which the sight of extraordinary mercies should produce in us? They are the same as were produced in the spectators of this miracle at Nain. And what were these? An abasing and reverential sense of the divine presence, exalted views of Christ, an open profession of our faith in him, a thankful acknowledgment of his goodness and truth, a hope in his mercy. "There came a fear on all; and

they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his people."

Need I tell you, brethren, that it would be happy for you, if mercy never entered your houses or your hearts, never even came within your sight, without bringing forth in you such effects as these? Let me rather strive to leave impressed on your mind a few practical reflections, which the things you have heard are calculated to enforce.

How strange is it that any of the afflicted should be backward to apply to Jesus Christ for relief! What have we now seen in him? The compassion of a man; the most loving kindness of which our nature is capable, the tenderest mercy.

But compassion, you say, will not meet your case; you need something more than pity. There is in Christ something more. We see in him the power of the everlasting God. He can help you in all difficulties, give you a happy issue out of all afflictions, take off from you the burden of any griefs or any sins.

Perhaps, brethren, you doubt this truth. You may be saying in your hearts, "There may be hope for others, but there is none for me. My misery will admit of no relief. My friend is gone. My child is taken from me. No miracle

now rouses the slumbering dead ; and how shall I be comforted ? Nothing is left for the desolate, but to humble themselves, to mourn and die." O what a sinful limiting of the power of God is here ! Who gave you at first the comforts you have lost ? The Lord gave them. Were they all the comforts he had to give ? Is he so poor, that he must fetch them out of their graves, or leave you wretched ? Can an arm of flesh, can dust and ashes be necessary for the peace of that heart, with which he who fills a crowded heaven with blessedness, can do whatsoever he will ? True, he will not now raise the dead. He needs them not. He can make you happier without them, than he ever made you with them. He can put himself in the place of departed friends. Without the aid of a single creature, he can give you a peace which the loss of all that is dear to you could not destroy, nor the opening of all the graves which were ever closed, increase.

Of how vast importance is it to us all to secure the friendship of this great Saviour ! In one sense, it is already ours. There is not a sinner staining the earth with his crimes, to whom the Son of God does not prove himself a Friend. But amidst the compassion towards us which fills his heart, there is a love of his Father's law, a love of holiness, stronger than it all. He might have saved a ruined world without a pang or a groan. Who

could have controlled his mercy? But no. Rather than sin should be esteemed a trifle, he took on him our form, he stood in our world, "he gave his back to the smiters," he bled and died.

This fearful hatred of sin, this awful regard to justice, was as strong when he took our nature with him into heaven, as when he reigned there only in his own. Behold him weeping over the approaching miseries of Jerusalem. Never before was there in any human heart such strong compassion as that which poured forth those tears. But mark—the threatened miseries came. Before fifty years had past, the Jews were vagabonds on the earth, and Jerusalem was a heap of ruins.

Deceive not yourselves then. There is wrath in Christ, as well as compassion; a power to destroy, as great as his power to save; a voice which can say, not only, "Weep not," but, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

How stands the case with you, brethren? Are you the friends or the enemies of this almighty Jesus? You are now the objects of his compassion; can he shew forth the riches of his grace in you, when he comes to judge the world? Have you fled to him for deliverance from the curse of a broken law? Do you know that without him, your soul is lost and dead? no more able to quicken and save itself, than this dead man was able to raise up himself and live? Is Christ

your refuge, your hope, your all in all? No? Then, brethren, you will one day learn that he who can turn sorrow into joy, can also turn the little joy that mercy has left you, into the bitterest anguish. "There came a fear on all," when he declared his mighty power in shewing mercy and pity; what will be that fear which will shake the world, when he shall be revealed in the greatness of his strength, taking vengeance? It will force you to say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Do you tremble at the prospect of this wrath? Does it appear to you a real and fearful evil? Then draw from this history one reflection more. *With what confidence may the mourning penitent flee for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ!* This is the inference which Saint Paul draws from the contemplation of his great compassion. "Let us come boldly," says he, "to the throne of grace, that we may obtain"—what? Pity, comfort, help? No—"that we may obtain mercy," the mercy which we need more than we need any other mercy, mercy for our souls, salvation.

He whom this history proclaims to be so willing to save the heart from the light sorrows of this present time, is far more willing to redeem the

soul from the bitter and lasting pains of eternity. He had compassion on a mother as she was weeping for an only son ; will he not have compassion on you who are trembling for a soul, your only soul, the soul which once lost, is lost for ever ? He helped her unasked ; not a cry nor a prayer came from her ; will he refuse to help you when you implore his mercy ? Hear his own promise ; “ Ask, and ye shall have ; seek, and ye shall find.” Hear his own complaint ; “ Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.” Hear the record of a prophet and an apostle ; “ Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” “ Call ye then upon him while he is near.” Approach him as one that has promised you mercy, as one that is seated on a throne of grace for the express purpose of shewing mercy, as one that “ delighteth in mercy.” Glorify him by embracing his promises, by laying hold by faith on his great salvation. “ This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.” Seek life at his hands ; expect it ; not such a life as this dead youth received, a few feverish years polluted with the sins of earth, darkened by sorrows, and ending in corruption ; but a life of “ glory, honour, and immortality ;” a life like the Redeemer’s own, incorruptible and undefiled, quiet as the heavens, and secure as the throne of God.

SERMON XI.

SINS REMEMBERED BY GOD.

PSALM xc. 8.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

SOONER or later, brethren, we shall all understand these solemn words. Perhaps we think that we understand them already. We deceive ourselves. There is a truth and a meaning in them, of which the greater part of mankind know little more than the walls around us. The day of judgment will make them plain. Before however that day arrives, their importance must, in some degree, be discovered by us. If we see it for the first time in an eternal world, we are lost.

What then is the first step towards this discovery? It is to get as clear a notion as we can, of the objects which the great God is here said

to place so very near him. And this we shall obtain, if we ask, in the first instance, what those things are of which the psalmist speaks; and then notice, secondly, the peculiar propriety with which he calls them ours.

I. The first of these enquiries brings before us nothing which, in itself, can give us one moment's pleasure. It forces on our attention subjects of painful, but yet of tremendous interest; things which make devils tremble, and angels wonder; evils which have cursed this once happy world, and will soon destroy it; enemies which, even if conquered, will turn us into dust, and which, if yielded to, will cast us into hell. And what are they? Nothing more than the things we so often regard as trifles—iniquities and sins.

1. "Thou hast set *our iniquities* before thee." We all know what is meant by iniquity; it is another name for sin. And what is sin? Not merely what we think wrong, nor what our neighbours think wrong, no, nor what ministers tell us is wrong—it is what the Lord of all thinks wrong. The scripture gives us this plain account of it; "Sin is the transgression of the law." Whose law? The great God's.

One thing then is already clear—we are all sinners. We have all broken God's holy law. The Bible tells us so. "All we like sheep have

gone astray," says Isaiah. "All have sinned," says Paul. "In many things we offend all," says James. "There is not a just man upon the earth," says Solomon, "that doeth good and sinneth not." Our ignorance must be fearfully great, if our own consciences also do not tell us the same.

2. How many offences we may have crowded into our short lives, none but a heart-searching God can tell. The psalmist takes it for granted, that they are more than our most suspicious neighbours, or than even our own hearts suppose. He goes on to speak of "*secret sins*," and he speaks of them as though they were sins of which we are all guilty. And is he not right, brethren? Is there a man amongst us all, whose conscience does not accuse him of many such sins as these? Is there a man on the earth, whose hidden transgressions are not his heaviest, his worst?

Many of our iniquities are unknown even to ourselves. We are sunk very low. One sin is enough to ruin our souls. We often hear this; we profess to believe it; and yet we go on sinning every moment we breathe, without being conscious, perhaps for hours or days together, that we are sinning at all.

You know where this sad work is carried on—our own wicked hearts are the authors of it all. Within their dark recesses, all our secret sins are committed. They consist partly in the want of

right feelings towards the Being who made us. But these are not the worst of them: we cherish wrong feelings towards God and towards men.

Their number is consequently past all conception. It is increasing while I am speaking, and you are hearing of them. It increases every instant. "Who can tell how oft he offendeth?" We can number our pulses as they beat, we can number the moments as they fly, we might number even the hairs of our heads; but we cannot count the movements of our ever restless minds. And every movement is a crime. Such God regards it. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart," says he, "is only evil continually." What follows? We cannot number our sins.

Their guilt too is unspeakably great. Perhaps, brethren, you have doubts on this point. You are ready to say, "What, can we be guilty, and yet not know it? Can there be guilt in an error of which we are unconscious?" If we put this question to our fellow-men, many of them will answer, "No:" but what have men to do with this matter? It lies only between us and our God. Let us however hear the testimony of some of the very best of our race. Turn to your prayer-books. Our church, in her Litany, calls these unknown transgressions "ignorances;" she

connects them with sins; she teaches us to pray for the forgiveness of them. And she found the petition in the scripture; "Cleanse thou me," says David, "from my secret faults." But David was wrong perhaps; feeling might mislead him. No; in the fourth chapter of Leviticus, we find the great God himself appointing a special sacrifice for these sins. And how does the following chapter end? With the most express and repeated declarations of their guilt; "If a soul sin and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he wist" or knew "it not, yet he is guilty, and shall bear his iniquity." "He hath certainly trespassed against the Lord."

Observe also how the psalmist brings home these iniquities to us all. There is no escaping from his language by saying, "I am pardoned and justified; my sins are blotted out:"—he himself was pardoned. He is styled in the title of this very psalm, "A man of God." And yet he numbers himself among the transgressors; he includes his own sins among those which God so closely beholds. None then must say, "This text concerns not me." The holiest man on the earth is as much concerned in this declaration, as the most abandoned sinner. It is as true of Moses, as of Pharaoh; of Peter, as of Judas; of Paul, as of Satan. It comprehends us all, and all in an

equal degree. And not only so, it comprehends all the iniquities of us all.

We have been applying it perhaps to some of our more heinous and daring sins, but it reaches farther. It includes not only “those things whereof our conscience is afraid,” but innumerable transgressions which we have long ago forgotten, and which perhaps never gave us one moment’s disquiet. The follies of our childhood, the iniquities of our youth, the misdeeds of our riper years; the sins of our hands, the sins of our lips, the sins of our hearts; our sins in company, our sins alone; our sins in our business, our sins in our pleasures; our sins at home, our sins abroad; our light-heartedness and pride in our prosperity, and our impatience, and murmuring, and rebellion, in our troubles; our stifled convictions, our forgotten resolutions, our broken vows; our contempt of the wrath of God, our abuse of his mercy; above all, the little value we have set on the great salvation of his dear Son;—it is of all these, in all their multitude and all their enormity, of which Moses here speaks. He calls them ours. Not satisfied with laying them on our heads, he bids us look on them as our property, as altogether our own.

II. Let us then go on to consider, secondly, why we are to view them in this light—*the pecu-*

liar propriety with which we may regard the sins we have committed, as our own.

We are ready enough to use this language concerning other things. Our sins however are more our own, than any thing else we possess. Indeed we possess nothing else.

Look over the earth. Not an atom of its dust is ours. We have no claim to it, no right in it. Bring forward what title to it we may, it will prove nothing in our favour. It may bar our fellow-men, but this is all it can do. It will not stand against God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

If we look through eternity, the case is the same. Its riches are unsearchable. It is one immense storehouse of wealth. But then it is wealth which is not ours. On what there can fallen man write his proud name? On nothing. On nothing? O that it were so! There is one thing in eternity, which man has indeed made his own. And what is that? Those bitter wages which his sins have earned—hell and its pains.

But let us come to the point. Our sins are our own, for *we are their authors*.

No title can be better than that which creation gives; none so good. If then there is any thing which we may be said to have called out of nothing into existence, be it what it may, it is ours—ours by a better title than that with which

our richest neighbour treads his fields, or the most lawful monarch wears his crown. The question is then, What have we thus created?

We need not say one word about any of the objects we behold around us. They all bear the stamp of another author, the great Creator of the heavens and the earth. The only things which can for one moment be thought the work of our creating power, must be found within us. And what are these? Learning, knowledge, wisdom. Some of us have laboured hard for these. Our minds at first were almost empty; we have filled them, and filled them too, as it might seem, by a new creation, by images, and thoughts, and feelings, which we can trace to no foreign source, and to which we conceive that we have a just and well earned claim. But no. Strip us of the knowledge which we have had imparted to us, leave us only the thoughts which we have created, the ideas which have had their origin altogether within our own breasts—what are we? We are sunk lower than the brutes which perish. We are idiots.

As for moral excellencies, spiritual graces, we are no more the authors of these, than we are of the holiness of the Lord of hosts, or the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are all “the fruits of the Spirit,” the work and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Could we give birth to a single holy

thought, we should do more than Job thought possible, or than Paul could accomplish.

But turn to our sins. Where shall we find their creator? You know how our fallen parents acted in paradise. Both acknowledged their transgression, but each disowned being the first author of it. One charged her crime on the tempting serpent, the other on his partner in rebellion, and even on his God. "The serpent beguiled me," said one. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me," said the other, "she gave me of the tree." Precisely thus have all their children acted. We are obliged to admit that we are sinners; the fact is too plain to be denied; but is sin our work? Is its first cause and spring to be discovered in our hearts? Every tongue says, "No." We "all, with one consent, begin to make excuse." We go out of ourselves to find its root. We lay the blame of it on our situation, on the frailty of our nature, on some fellow-sinner, on Satan; and when all these fail us, rather than take it to ourselves, we do as Adam did, we cast it on our God.

It is astonishing how soon, and how strongly, and how extensively, this principle of self-vindication works. The most stupid are quick when they have to clear themselves. The babe that can scarcely utter a word, is ready in an instant with an excuse for the fault in which it is detected.

The man whose pride has been broken, over whose conscience the Holy Spirit rules, who knows that his iniquity is from first to last his own, even the enlightened and humble Christian often feels it hard to say, "I am verily guilty. I am without excuse."

But our efforts are useless. As far as we are sinful, we are criminal. Whatever may have excited them, or whoever may have shared in them, our sins have taken their rise in ourselves. They are as much our own, as though there were not one unclean spirit to betray, one evil example to mislead, or one temptation to allure. The history of every sin is short and simple; "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The testimony of Saint Paul is the same. In his epistle to the Ephesians, he speaks of "the course of this world," and of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" he admits their dreadful influence: but does he ascribe our trespasses and sins to them? In no wise. He goes within us. He tells us that in obeying them, we have only been "fulfilling the desires

of the flesh and of the mind." And what says our Lord—he who so well knows our hearts, and who loves those wretched hearts too well, to bring against them any false charge? "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts," and every evil work.

We have now an answer to our enquiry. We are the authors of our iniquities and sins; they are therefore ours, exclusively and altogether our own.

If we have any spiritual thought or feeling within us, this truth will call them both into exercise: we shall not be able to treat it with indifference. It will, it must give rise to many solemn reflections.

And this will be one of the first of them—*Of how much more than I ever imagined, am I possessed!* When I have estimated my property, I have thought only of my silver and gold, my houses and lands, my trade and my merchandize; but what are these in amount or in consequence, when compared with the things I have passed over, my iniquities and sins?

Perhaps, brethren, you have no earthly property to think of. You have wished and toiled for a share of this world's goods, but could never obtain it. But what a treasure of sin have you been storing up! The wealth of your richest neighbour is as nothing to it. He can count his

wealth—a few thousands is the sum of it all—but which of us can count his iniquities? Number them by millions, and the half of them will not be told. Reckon up those sins only, which you can remember—the number is fearfully great. Let those which you once remembered and have now forgotten, be added—the mind shrinks from the accumulated mass. But bring your unknown, your secret sins to the account; let every unholy thought, every wrong movement of the heart, let every offence and defect which the penetrating eye of a holy God has seen within you, be summed up—“who can understand his errors?” What numbers can express them? What mind can take in the vast amount? Well might we say one to another, as Eliphaz said to Job, “Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?”

But there may be property which is not worthy of its possessor's thoughts. It may be extensive, but worthless; great in amount, but yet insignificant in value. The owner of a forest, for instance, thinks but little of the myriads of leaves which drop in autumn from his trees. Were he ever so mindful of them, they could do him but little good, and, if neglected, they do him no harm. Our sins however are not property of this kind. There is something in them of such vast importance, that they rivet the attention, they are the objects of the close and constant inspection of

an infinite God. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee," says the psalmist, "our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

A second reflection then springs up here—*How thoughtful ought I to be of my sins!* To forget or neglect them is ruin to my soul. They are not like my silver or gold, which will lie harmless in my purse; they are like the torrent in my fields, which must occupy my care and my labour, or it will lay every thing waste. They are like the disease in my veins, which will carry me to the grave, if I let it alone.

And then follows a third reflection—*How anxious ought I to be to dispose aright of my sins!* But what can I do with them? With their criminality, you can do nothing. It is inseparable from you; it will cleave to you for ever. May it for ever deeply abase you!

But there is resting on you guilt of another kind. Your sins not only render you deserving of Jehovah's righteous displeasure, they subject you to it. They bring down on you the sentence, the curse of his broken law. You are therefore in a state of legal, as well as of moral guilt; condemned, as well as sinful;—not like malefactors who are out of the reach of the law which they have violated, guilty but yet safe;—you are like criminals who have been apprehended, tried, sentenced.

Now this is a guilt which is capable of being removed from you ; from which too you must be delivered, or be undone. But where can you place it ? Who can deliver you ? There stands unseen, at your right hand, one who has long been waiting to release you from the heavy load. " Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." He " bare our sins in his own body on the tree." The Lord laid there on him " the iniquity of us all." And now " all that believe, are justified from all things." " They shall not come into condemnation, but have passed from death unto life." There is, in fact, " no condemnation" for them.

Here then bring your sins, brethren. Come and cast them on the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the guilty Jew confessed his transgressions, and put them upon the head of the scape-goat ; so draw near in penitence to this far nobler sacrifice, and, by a simple faith in the efficacy of his blood, lay your sins on him. He will bear them all away, carry them into a land of oblivion, where they shall be remembered against you no more.

In this work the Redeemer delights. He is more willing to receive your iniquities, than you are to receive his mercies, than the neediest beggar would be to receive your gold. Nay, collect all the treasures which the earth contains, no miser would grasp them with half the joy, with

which the blessed Jesus takes the load of a transgressor's sins. With him their bitterness is past. It was finished with his dying cry. They can wound him no more. But, brethren, they can wound you. Refuse to lay them on him, and they will pierce your inmost soul. They may sting you almost to madness before you die ; but when you die, their work of misery will indeed begin. They will overwhelm you with an awe, a horror, and a despair, which will make you spectacles of terror, monuments of wrath.

SERMON XII.

SINS REMEMBERED BY GOD.

PSALM xc. 8.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

“THE blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” Happy is the man who really believes this truth! then happiest of all, when he feels its power! But it never lives alone in any mind. There are other truths which must be received and remembered also, before the value of this can be known. The text is one of them. Without a heart-felt belief, a daily remembrance of it, we shall never learn a Saviour’s worth. We cannot give credit to it, and despise him.

Has it, brethren, made the Lord Jesus Christ precious to you? If not, be assured that you have never yet viewed it in its true light. Either

you are ignorant of its meaning, or you are not heartily convinced of its truth, or you are strangers to its importance. To these three points then, let me call your attention; and may the Holy Spirit grant that it may not be called to them in vain!

I. Consider, first, *the meaning of this declaration*. It seems to include two ideas.

1. *God sees our iniquities*. They are “before him.” When they are committed, they are committed before his face; not in his presence merely, but directly in his sight. He consequently sees them distinctly, clearly, thoroughly. None of them can escape him, none deceive him. This truth the psalmist most forcibly expresses. He bids us look on our sins as arrayed “in the light of Jehovah’s countenance.” And who can tell us what that light is? The sun which is shining in the heavens, throws around us day by day a glorious splendour; it discovers to us more iniquity on the earth, than we can sometimes bear the sight of without a pang: but what is the light of yonder sun, compared with the brightness of the Almighty’s face? It is utter darkness. And yet in the brightness of that face are all our sins committed, all seen.

Hence they appear to God in their true colours. A borrowed light, a candle or a lamp, seldom

reflects objects as they really are. Nor can sin be viewed aright, except by God and near God. Beneath his piercing eye, it is stripped of all its poor disguises. In the holiness of his presence, its depravity comes out. Its guilt, its pollution, its baseness, stand naked and exposed.

Suppose yourselves, brethren, in some neglected and miserable room. It is night;—you see nothing of the wretchedness around you. But open the window; let the moon shine into the room;—you begin to perceive its misery. After a while, the sun rises, dim and in clouds;—now your eyes are offended with the objects that surround you. But at last the clouds break; a ray darts bright across the room;—all its filthiness is visible; you discern even the particles of dust that are floating in the air. And thus is it with sin. What do we see of it in this dark world? By nature, nothing. Let the glimmering light of civilization and morals reach us;—we catch some faint ideas of its character. Let the bright sun of revelation shine;—it shews us more of its evil. Bring down the Holy Spirit from above, let the God who at first commanded light to shine out of darkness, shine into our hearts;—now the transgressor stands astonished at the exceeding sinfulness of sin. He lays himself in the dust. He says with trembling lips and a trembling heart, “Behold, I am vile.” But what is the light of civilization,

or of scripture, or even of the Holy Spirit in a human breast, to the light of heaven? What does the holiest man see of sin, in comparison with God?

2. The psalmist's language implies also that *God remembers our sins*; "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee," placed them, fixed them there. They do not flit, as it were, before the face of the Lord, appear and vanish; they stand still in his presence, they remain for ever unmoved and unaltered in his sight. It must be so.

We say that we remember things, when they occasionally enter our minds, when we can recall them to our memories at our will. We can remember them in no other way. But what the great God remembers, he never forgets. What he once knows, he always knows. The sin of Adam is as present in his view now, as when that guilty man first tasted of the deadly fruit. It is the same with all the sins of all his creatures. Since their foolish hearts first gave them birth, there never has been a moment in which any one of them has been out of his thoughts: there never can be such a moment. "The Lord," says the prophet Amos, "hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works."

Such is the meaning of the declaration in the text. It is evidently a very solemn declaration.

It would be so, even if it related only to the generations that are gone, or to some distant world which we have never seen. But it relates to us. The iniquities it speaks of, are ours—the open and secret sins which we ourselves have committed, and thus made our own.

And what does it testify of these? It seems to recall them from the dead. We had forgotten them. They had passed away from our memories like the dreams of the night. We thought them clean gone, perished for ever. But here comes one of our fellow-transgressors, and assures us that they are still in existence, that these disregarded and forgotten things are now all standing in one fearful mass directly before the eyes of a holy God. How did he know this? Are his words true?

II. Let us go on to enquire what proofs we can find of *their truth*.

It is plain that the psalmist had never gone up into heaven, to look into the book of God's remembrance. If he knew ought that was there, he must have known it either by direct inspiration, or by something which he had discovered God to be, or to have said, or to have done. Inspiration seems out of the question here; it was not needed. We must look for the proofs of which we are in search, to other sources.

And these are as open to us as they were to Moses.

1. Consider the nature of God. Remember *what he is*. We are told that he is a "God of knowledge;" of knowledge, not like ours nor like an angel's, limited; but of boundless, infinite knowledge. And by infinite knowledge is meant knowledge which comprehends all things; which embraces, in one and the same moment, every thing that ever was, or ever will be, or ever can be known; knowledge which cannot be increased or impaired. Low indeed is the highest idea we can form of such an understanding as this. We may however see enough of it to convince us that the awful saying of the psalmist must be true. Hide but a single sin from God, take it but for a twinkling of an eye from his remembrance, he might be told or reminded of it; a pitying angel or an accusing devil might add to the number of his thoughts; and where would his boundless knowledge be?

2. But we are not left to our own reasonings and conclusions in this matter. Consider the declarations of God. Think of *what he has said*.

No language can be plainer, none can be stronger, than that which God has employed in the confirmation of this truth. Hear him speaking of Babylon the great, of his enemies in this wicked world; "Her sins have reached unto

heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." Hear him speaking of his friends, of his church, his beloved Israel. "I do remember," says he by one prophet, "all their wickedness." "Mine eyes," says he by another, "are upon all their ways; they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes." "The sin of Judah," he adds, "is written—how? not with a common pen on perishable materials, so written that it may be erased by accident or worn out by time. No. How did Job wish to leave on record his confidence in his living Redeemer? "O," says he, "that my words were now written! O that they were printed in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" Thus the Lord declares the sin of his people to be recorded; "It is written with a pen of iron and with a point of a diamond;" with instruments which men employ to leave the most durable inscriptions on the flinty rock or imperishable glass.

3. And these are not vain words. The daily conduct of God is in strict agreement with them. Consider his ways. Look at *what he has done* on the earth.

We all know that there is misery in the world, much misery, deep misery. We see it, we feel it. While men are foolishly saying that "the Lord regardeth not iniquity," his judgments are

in all the earth; they are often in our own families and houses, perhaps in our own bosoms. Go where we may, we see marked on many a forehead, "Lamentation, mourning, and woe." And were it laid bare, where is the breast in which we might not find concealed an aching heart, grief or care, disappointed hopes or withered joys, some fountain of sorrow or root of bitterness?

Now whence comes all this suffering? Does it come forth of the dust? Does it spring out of the ground? Is it all a casualty, an accident, the work of chance? How is it then, that the chance which has broken so many hearts, has never yet made one completely blessed? No, brethren; this misery is the work of a holy and offended God. It springs forth from those iniquities which he has set before him.

This was evidently the feeling of the psalmist. Mark where he has placed this text. It stands in the midst of a touching complaint over human vanity and human misery. "We are consumed," says he, "by thine anger; by thy wrath are we troubled." And why? "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee." And how did he know they were set there? He immediately tells us; "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale."

Sometimes also the Lord steps out of his ordinary path, as though determined that the children

of men should see and confess his remembrance of their sins. Why were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed? Why were the Amalekites driven out of the land of their fathers? Why did the nations of Canaan perish? One answer will serve for all—the eyes of an insulted God were fastened on their crimes.

And look into his church. How has he acted there? Let the dying Moses say. Let the weeping David declare. And what will Jacob tell us? That man was exceedingly dear to God, chosen and beloved. But while he was yet young, he sinned against him; he deceived his aged father. From that moment, the Lord never forgot his sin. He began with banishing him from his country and his home. Then for seven years all seems quiet; but at the end of these years, Jacob, in his turn, is deceived. Laban imposes on him. Instead of giving him the beloved Rachel for whom he had waited so long and toiled so hard, he gave him Leah. Year after year passes away, and the iniquity of Jacob seems forgotten. Rachel is his own, his children rise up and call him blessed, his flocks and herds are increased, his brother Esau is reconciled to him; all is peace. Where is his iniquity now? Where it was at first. Suffering has not removed it. Years have not worn it out. It is before the Lord. His daughter is shamefully defiled, and his two sons

Simeon and Levi, in avenging her wrongs, act more like assassins than men. Surely now the displeasure of heaven is past. No, brethren ; that which took place in the sick chamber of Isaac is present as ever before the face of a jealous God. There is yet an arrow in his quiver for Jacob's heart. Now Rachel dies, and now Joseph, his favourite boy, is lost. True, he finds him again, but what a pang for a father's soul mars his joy ! The old patriarch learns that ten of his other sons were little better than guilty of their brother's blood.

And is it not the same in the present day ? Why is the city, once the joy and dwelling place of Jehovah, trodden down of the heathen ? Why are the Jews wandering among the nations as outcasts and vagabonds ? Nearly two thousand years ago, the Lord of glory was crucified in their streets. "His blood be on us and on our children," was the horrid cry of their fathers. It reached the heavens. It still rings in the ears of the Lord of hosts. The blood of the Son of God is on their children.

Take an instance from common life. A man is dishonest. By overreaching his neighbours, by defrauding his country, or by some other unlawful means, he acquires property ; he enriches his children. But how often does such wealth come speedily to an end ! The curse of God seems on

it. It wastes away. In a few years perhaps its owners are poor as the poorest, are beggars in our sight.

Take yet one instance more. Look on a graceless and wicked son. In the days of his youth, he plants many a sting in his father's soul, and breaks his mother's heart. He goes on quietly for a while, and prospers. But he himself becomes a father, and then the Lord reveals himself as a sin-remembering and sin-avenging God. His own children fly in his face. Their conduct forces his mind back to the long forgotten scenes of his own early wickedness. He remembers a father and a mother whom his own vices stung, and then, like them, he goes down with sorrow to the grave.

O brethren, who can tell what judgments are hanging over some of us, for iniquities which we long since thought forgotten for ever? Who can tell how many hours of future bitterness some secret sin of the last week or month may have stored up for us? Who, as he thinks on these things, will not fly to a Saviour's cross, and say there, with the trembling psalmist, "O remember not the sins of my youth! O remember not against us our former iniquities!"

Now putting together what the great God is, what he has said, and what he has done, there is no escaping from this conclusion—our sins are

seen, they are remembered—the declaration in this text is true.

But what if it is true? Is it important? Or if important, is it so to us? It is. There is no truth that ever reached our ears, which can concern us more closely, or affect our best interests more deeply.

III. Let us endeavour, in the third place, to discover *its importance*.

Of this we can know but little. It is not fully understood even in the regions beyond the grave, those worlds of discovery and knowledge. Nothing but eternity can unfold it all. We may however obtain a faint idea of its greatness, by recollecting the purposes for which God thus holds our sins in his remembrance.

1. He keeps them there, that *he may eventually set them before us*.

We are all conscious that many things live in our memories, of which we seldom or never think. When told of them, we recollect them, and perhaps a long train of circumstances connected with them. This common operation of the memory may discover to us, that at present we know but little of its powers. It was designed to hold fast every idea that has ever past through our minds. It once probably had this power; sooner or later it will have it again. And then, brethren, where

will our sins be? They will rise, like ghosts, from the dead. They will be where the guilt of David was, when he said, "My sin is ever before me." They will be where the transgressions of the people of Jerusalem were, when, pricked in their heart, they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They will be where Cain's foul offence was, when he said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." They will be where the sin of Judas was, when he "went and hanged himself." They will be before our eyes; they will be rankling in our hearts. And it is God who will place them there. He touches the guilty conscience; he sets tormenting memory to work; and then our iniquities array themselves in terror before us. They lie, heavy as a mountain of lead, upon the conscience; they stick, like arrows, in the soul.

The anguish which they give, even when we are partially reminded of them in this life, is sometimes almost intolerable. It forced Paul, who complained of nothing else, to complain of his wretchedness. In the world to come, it will be ten-fold worse—terrifying, maddening, an ever-gnawing worm, a devouring fire, an everlasting burning.

2. Others also will know our sins. The Lord remembers them *to expose them*. He generally lays some of them bare before we die. Others

often come to the light after we are dead. But what is this? No more, when compared with the exposure of the great day, than the gleam of a taper to the blaze of a meridian sun; no more than a whisper to the thunder of the clouds. There is reason to believe that not a soul in the universe will be left ignorant of any one of our sins. Those of the ungodly will be revealed, that the justice of God may be magnified in their condemnation. Those of the pardoned will be proclaimed, that assembled worlds may adore the riches of Jehovah's grace.

Who can conceive aright of the dark mountains of iniquity, which we shall then see arise? Were the secret sins that we ourselves have committed, now exposed, what a scene of wonder would this church become! And O what a loathsome world would the earth appear, if all that is now going on in secret, were brought out before the light! But when we are standing before the Son of man, no secrets will be hidden; all the sins of all the world will rise up, in all their dreadful magnitude, before us; will astonish and dismay us.

3. But God remembers our sins for a purpose yet more awful still—that *he may call us to a strict account for them*. This Jeremiah teaches us. “Thine eyes,” says he, “are open upon all the ways of the sons of men;”—for what purpose? “to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

God, it is often said, “ will judge the world in righteousness.” “ He will reward every man according to his works.” Now how can he do this, unless he sets before him all our sins? A loose and general estimate of them, must not guide the sentence which will affect an immortal soul throughout eternity. The account must be strict, minute. We are accordingly told that God “ shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing.” “ I say unto you,” is the language of Christ, “ that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” “ The Lord,” says Paul, “ will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.” He will force from our trembling lips a faithful record of every crime we have committed ; he himself will display a register of every sin. And then, unless we can say of a Redeemer’s blood, “ It has cleansed me ;” and of a holy Saviour’s justifying righteousness, “ It is mine ;” every iniquity shall add to our condemnation, every transgression shall have its sting.

And now, brethren, judge for yourselves—are these things matters of importance, or are they trifles? If there be any thing hard to bear in the workings of an awakened conscience, if public exposure and shame be worthy of a thought, if

we apprehend any serious consequences from the judgment of the living God, then the declaration in the text is not a light and trifling saying ; it is of tremendous importance to us all.

Have you any sense of its importance ? There is perhaps hardly one among you, who is not ready to answer, " Yes." You say, " We are sure that we have never made light of this truth. We never speak of it but with the greatest seriousness. Sometimes when we have heard it read at the funeral of a friend, it has almost made us tremble." And is this all it has done within you and for you ? Then may the living God complain of you, as he did of Israel of old, " They consider not in their hearts, that I do remember all their wickedness." He does not say that they disbelieved it, or despised it, or even forgot it. All he complains of is, that it had no fixed place in their hearts. And what place has it in yours ? None. You have never even wished it to have any ; amid a crowd of other things, you have lost sight of it. Perhaps throughout your whole life, you have never spent a single hour, no nor a single minute, with your thoughts taken up with this truth, " The great God sees and remembers my sins."

This inconsideration cannot end well. It may seem a very harmless thing, but, all this while, it is hardening your hearts, and bringing on your ruin. What is it that has made many a death-

bed so wretched, and filled eternity with so much woe? It is nothing more than this inconsideration of which you are guilty, this thoughtlessness, this deadly unconcern. It never lasts longer than life. When eternity begins, reflection begins; and such reflection! so bitter, so harrowing, that existence becomes an intolerable curse. O brethren, what will you do, when you ask of a God of mercy only one drop of water to cool your tongue, and all you gain by your prayer is this piercing answer, "Son, remember, remember?"

Does this prospect alarm you? Then let this scripture shew you *your great need of Christ*. Give an angel all that the universe contains, he would not consent to have one sin before the eyes of God. Nay, offer to the poorest Christian all the collected riches of the earth to have one unpardoned iniquity there, the man would shudder at the thought. But how many unpardoned sins have some of you in that holy place? Ten thousand times ten thousand. How can you bear to think of them? How can you sit here in peace? How can you lie down at night in peace? The recollection is fearful now, but what will it be when conscience begins to sting, and shame begins to cover us, and judgment is at hand? O shall we not need a Helper and a Saviour then? Do we not need one now?

Learn then, from this truth, *to admire the riches*

of Jehovah's mercy. When we hear of the pardon of sin, we often think of it as the pardon of our late transgressions only. We forget our earlier sins. But God never offers us forgiveness without having in his mind every one of our iniquities. They are all before him. They are all as fresh in his memory and as hateful in his sight, as the sins of yesterday, as the transgressions of the present hour. Time has not worn away one atom of their guilt.

Try then to view your sins in a mass as God views them. Suppose all of them to have been crowded into one day; suppose this very sabbath to be that guilty day;—what think you of yourselves? Do you not say, “We are more sinful, more abominable, than tongue can tell?” What then must God think of you? At this very moment, the long and dark catalogue of your crimes is before his face, and he looks on the first and last of them alike, just as though neither of them were an hour old. And yet how does he act towards you? Instead of sending you quick into hell, he opens wide for you the gate of heaven. He holds out before you the dreadful scroll of your sins, and while you are trembling at the sight, and his violated law is thundering vengeance, he points to the cross of his dear Son, and says, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” And what is

the language of that bleeding Lamb? "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth." Nay, so complete and lasting is the pardon he offers you, that he speaks of it as though in conferring it he had laid aside one of his own perfections. He says to every sinner whom he finds washed in the blood and clothed in the righteousness of his Son, and says it of the very sins which are ever in his sight, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

Have you through grace sought and found this mercy? Let this declaration teach you *to live in a constant remembrance of your sins*. You see, brethren, the character which Moses, the author of this psalm, here assumes—it is the character which you yourselves long bore—that of a transgressor, a sinner. And do you not bear it now? One look within shews you that it is still your own. And can you forget the sins which so holy an eye beholds, and such amazing grace pardons? Ought you to forget them? Never. The instant you lose sight of them or of the divine remembrance of them, you sin against God and wrong your own souls; you throw a veil over the glory of Jehovah's mercy; you place yourselves on ground whereon no child of the dust can ever stand; you close your hearts against the sweetest joys that a sinner can ever know. Who is the

happiest being on the earth ? Not the man who says that he is in Christ, and will think of his sins no more. It is he who looks on all his manifold and great transgressions, and, while he loathes himself for their vileness, can lay himself in the dust and say, “ I am pardoned.” This recollection melts him. It fills his heart with unutterable love for his dying Lord ; it makes his very name precious to his soul. It abases him so low, that when he is taken up into heaven, angels can scarcely bend down to his humility. It lifts him so high, that they cannot reach his blessedness. Whether in heaven or in earth, this is the character and this is the happiness of the Christian—he is a pardoned sinner—he feels and acts as a pardoned sinner—he is a man who “ loveth much,” because he sees that “ much has been forgiven him.”

SERMON XIII.

SINS BLOTTED OUT BY GOD.

ISAIAH xliii. 25.

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

THE world, brethren, was once a paradise : it is now a prison ; and we who live and move in it, are criminals in the hands of justice, and liable every hour to be called to our trial and execution. It is clear then, that of all the blessings we ever heard of, pardon is that which we most need. In comparison with it, none other is worthy of a single thought. But where shall we look for it ? Here in this text comes one proclaiming a pardon, and almost lays it at our feet.

Who then is he ? Let this be our first enquiry. What is the nature of the pardon he brings ? Let

this be our second. What is the motive which leads him to offer it to us? Let us take this as our third. How shall we act with respect to it? Let this be our last.

I. No tidings can be more welcome than those which are here published, none more joyful; but *who is he that brings us this offer of forgiveness?* On this point depends all the value of his news. He himself seems aware of its importance, for he evidently wishes to turn on himself our enquiry and notice. He speaks too as though he thought that he could quiet our most anxious suspicions, as though he were sure that a pardon coming from him, would leave us nothing to fear or desire.

He can be no fellow-mortal then, who speaks thus; no prophet or angel. All the strength of angels and men could no more blot out such sins as ours, than it could drive the midnight shades from the sky. It is the great God himself, who undertakes this work. It is the Holy One of eternity, who comes among us and says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions."

There is more in this assurance than a mere glance can discover.

1. He who thus offers us pardon, is *the Being whom our sins have most displeased.*

We know how offensive iniquity sometimes is even to our own polluted minds. It can make

the hearts of parents and friends ache. It has often caused us to shudder as we have witnessed it. "Rivers of water," said David, "run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law." But what is our abhorrence of sin? Nothing. Would you pull down a house, because a sinner had entered it? Would you lay waste a garden or a field, because it had been the scene of a crime? But mark the conduct of God. He built the world. When he had made it, he called it good. It is an immense world, a lovely world, a glorious monument of power and goodness. But sinners have trodden on it—that is enough—it is accursed in the sight of God; he will soon sweep it from the heavens.

None but God can tell how God loathes iniquity. It is "that abominable thing which he hates." It is the only thing which he hates; the only thing on earth or in hell, which can excite in him one moment's displeasure. Yet with the objects of his abhorrence full before him, with all our sins blazoned before his face, what does he say? "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions."

2. *He is also the Being whom our sins have most injured.* I speak after the manner of men; or rather after the manner of God, for he himself speaks of sin as an injury done to him. "Will a man rob God?" says he; "yet ye have robbed

me." And well may he say so. None of us have given God his due. Of that debt which, as creatures and sinners, we owe him, we have not paid him one mite. On the contrary, we have been employing every moment of our existence in returning him evil for good. No man ever injured man, as we have injured God. He is the most outraged Being in the universe, who brings us these tidings; one whose name we have profaned, whose authority we have trampled on, whose glory we have stained, whose displeasure at our foul offences we have mocked at, and—worst of all, that which robs him more than all other wrongs—whose amazing mercy we have despised.

2. Here then are two great points gained. The sinner however must have more. If I enter my neighbour's house, and rob him of his property, he may forgive me the wrong. I return home—my family and connections whom my conduct has grieved, may pardon me. But am I safe? No. The officers of justice are in pursuit of me; the laws of my country must be satisfied; nothing short of my sovereign's pardon can save me.

Thus the dying Stephen reasoned. The savage Jews were stoning him. He was the party injured by their violence. He forgave them. But what was his pardon worth? They had a King reigning above. They had broken his laws. "With

a loud voice" therefore the martyred saint cries to him for mercy for them ; " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

He then who is here represented as blotting out our sins, is our King, *the very Being whose laws we have broken.*

We must not consider God, when we sin against him, merely as an injured or offended Father. He is the Monarch of the world, its Lawgiver, its Sovereign. There is none above him, none equal to him. It follows therefore, that if he pardons, none can condemn. He made the law ; he is above the law. I have broken it—it condemns me ;—he sets me free—I am safe.

4. But our final trial is not yet past. And what if it is not ? He who brings us these tidings of mercy, is none other than *the Being who will be our Judge.*

This is not an unimportant point. A king may determine to pardon a criminal, may promise him a pardon ; but the Judge appears ; the prisoners are summoned before him ; the guilty man is condemned. He pleads his sovereign's promise ; but what does this avail him ? The judge knows nothing of it. He leaves him to suffer. No reprieve comes. He dies. Not so however the man whom the King of heaven pardons. He is called on to meet his Judge ; and such a Judge ! so awful, so terrible in his greatness, that the earth

and the heavens flee away before his face. The astonished man lifts up his enquiring eyes to the throne before him ; and whom does he see on it ? No enemy, no stranger, no minister of vengeance. He sees, with unutterable joy, his own gracious King, the Son of man, the very Being who said to him in his prison, in the days of his flesh, " I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." How then can he fear ? The tribunal of justice is changed to a throne of grace. The Judge who sits on that throne, is the Saviour of his soul, the very Jesus who once hung on a cross to atone for his crimes.

On this head then the most fearful may be satisfied. If he offers us pardon, whom we have most displeased and most injured, who is our Monarch and will be our Judge, let the whole world condemn, it cannot harm us. Every hair of our head is safe.

II. But what kind of pardon does he offer ? Just such a pardon as our lost situation requires ; just such a pardon as becomes the Lord of the universe to give. Consider *its nature*.

It is expressed in the text by the " blotting out of transgressions," and the " not remembering of sins." Now one of the first thoughts that enter the mind, is a suspicion of some contradiction between this language and that which God some-

times employs when speaking of sin, even of the sin he has pardoned. We read here of his ceasing to remember it. He describes it, in other places, as being ever before him, fixed in the light of his countenance. He swears that he will never forget it. And we know that his words are true. A God of infinite knowledge must see all things, must remember all things—every leaf of the woods that has withered and dropped; much more the transgressions of those so dear to him, as his children and saints. How then can these declarations be reconciled? Only in one way, and that the very last way in which we would wish them to be reconciled; the way which, of all others, is most humiliating to our natural pride, offensive sometimes even to the partially renewed heart.

When God speaks of remembering sin, the sin of his people, he alludes to the moral guilt, the turpitude, the demerit of it. This is, in its own nature, as eternal as himself. When he speaks of blotting out sin, of forgetting sin, he speaks of its legal guilt, its sentence, its curse, the woe denounced against it. This is done away with when the soul turns itself to Christ. It ceases to exist. It is remembered no more.

Peter denied his Master. The baseness of his conduct, his oaths and his curses, are remembered on earth and in heaven. But where is the punish-

ment of his sin? Where is the vengeance it merited? It is out of existence. For seventeen hundred years, the man has not had a tear in his eye, nor a pang in his heart.

The sum of the whole is this—pardon leaves the desert of condemnation where it finds it, on the head of the transgressor; it frees him from condemnation itself.

1. The pardon then which is here proclaimed, is a remission of punishment, and it is a *full*, complete remission.

Here many a guilty conscience hesitates. “O were it not for a few heinous sins,” says one transgressor, “I would sue for a pardon. Were my iniquities the common frailties of my brethren, numerous as they might be, I would plead and hope for forgiveness. But the crimes of that one dark hour, the transgressions of that dreadful year!—they are too black to be covered.” “The multitude of my sins dismays me,” says another. But look at this proclamation. It shews us God blotting out transgressions and sins. He means all transgressions, all sins; sins as great as Manasseh’s, and as numerous as David’s; most certainly as numerous and great, as those of the guiltiest of the people to whom he is speaking. His words were otherwise a mockery of them. He pardons them by blotting them out; and what is that? It supposes them written, recorded;—where? In

the book of his remembrance. And cannot the hand which can touch that awful record, cross out a thousand debts as well as one? Cannot the debt for a thousand talents be erased as easily as though it were for ten?

Turn to another declaration. Look at two clouds as they rise in the heavens. One is a blot on the sky, dark and huge; the other is scarcely visible, a light, fleecy thing. We can remove neither. God can remove both. But which the most easily? We are ready to say, the lightest. That cloud then shall not be first mentioned as an emblem of Israel's sins. Look at the other. A breath which you neither hear nor feel, takes it. Though heavy and threatening, it passes over the mountains; in a moment it is gone. And its light companion follows it. The sky is clear. Now hear the voice of Israel's God; now learn the extent of his pardoning mercy; "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins."

The fact is, brethren, that the grace of God can as easily triumph over many and great sins, as over few and comparatively light iniquities. Ample provision is made in the everlasting covenant for the greatest possible enormities of every humbled sinner. Hence no partial forgiveness is ever offered us. If we are justified at all, it is "from all things." God has no other pardon to bestow.

No other would save us. One uncanceled sin would prove our ruin.

2. There may be lingering in some mind yet another fear. "I believe," says the stricken penitent, "in the fulness and extent of Jehovah's mercy. Vile as my past transgressions have been, the blood of Christ, I trust, has cleansed me from them. But am I not a transgressor still? And may not this rebellious heart of mine provoke the Lord, before I die, to withdraw the pardon he has given me?" No, brethren. The forgiveness which God bestows, is an *eternal*, as well as a complete pardon; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions; "blotteth them out," as a creditor blots out from his book an enormous debt. He does not let the debt stand over for a time; he makes it void, looks on it as paid.

And if this be not enough, the Lord speaks yet again. And O what sounds of mercy come from his lips! He whose memory retains every sin we have committed, more surely and firmly than a sculptured rock or leaves of brass, the great, the infinite God, declares to his guilty Israel, "I will not remember thy sins." What can this language mean? It means, brethren, that the sins which Jehovah pardons, are no more to him when he sits in judgment, than as though he had never seen them. It means that the guiltiest of you, if washed in the Saviour's blood,

are as safe, as secure from final condemnation, as though you had never been stained by one transgression. It is not a respite of which the Lord here tells you; it is an acquittal, a full and eternal discharge. It is more. It is an act of oblivion. It is the casting of your sins, of all your sins, into "the depths of the sea." It is like the passing of the ocean over a writing on sand—the record is gone, it can never be recalled.

Is this language too bold? Then let God himself explain his mercy. "In those days and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found;"—and why? "for I will pardon them."

3. But when is this great pardon given? Now; the very moment when grace brings the sinner to himself, and mercy finds him at the Redeemer's feet. It is an *immediate* pardon. What read we here? Not "I will forgive;" but "I forgive." "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." "Even now while I am speaking, my hand is passing over the black, the crowded page. I have spoken; the work is done; thou art free. Thou must wait indeed awhile before thy pardon is publicly proclaimed; my angels must be summoned, and all the sleeping dead must be awaked; thou mayest wait for a few short days before thy

own unbelieving heart rejoices in its blessedness, or even knows it; but the deed of acquittal is written; I have set my seal to it; the blood of the covenant is on it. Since I can swear by no greater, I swear by myself, that it shall never be recalled. Thou wilt find it in my word. Place it in thy bosom. Rejoice in it when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And when thy lips are opened after the silence of the grave, when thou seest me on my throne, and hast pleaded 'Guilty, guilty,' at my bar, then bring it forth. I will acknowledge it. The heavens shall hear it and rejoice."

Such then is the pardon which God bestows. And is it not a most gracious pardon?—so full, that of all the multiplied millions of Israel's sins, there is not one left on the record;—so lasting, that it runs on with eternity;—so immediate, so prompt, that the guiltiest here might have it in an hour. Looking at the Being it comes from, we say with one pardoned sinner, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" Looking at the pardon itself, we exclaim with another, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?"

III. But why is all this? *Where shall we find the motives of this act of mercy?* This is our third

enquiry. The answer to it is short; it is humbling, but yet of all answers the most encouraging, the noblest. These four words, "for mine own sake," are the sum and substance of all the gospel; the hope of a lost world; the theme, the praise, the security of a saved one.

A good king never pardons without a reason for his conduct. This, in most cases, must be looked for either in the criminal or in himself. Seek it in these criminals. They are men who have been "making God to serve," oppressing him "with their sins," "wearying him with their iniquities." "Put me in remembrance," says he to them; "let us plead together; declare thou, that thou mayest be justified." They are silent; their own proud lips dare not talk of justice, no, nor even plead for mercy. And what can our lips say? They have said much. They have spoken of goodness and merit, of tears, and charities, and prayers, of good hearts and harmless lives; but what has God answered? "Ye are all as an unclean thing, and all your righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Misery, pollution, guilt; a darkened mind, a desperately wicked heart; vile affections, contending passions, and triumphant lusts; a soul as earthly as a worm's, as proud as Satan's;—these are the things among which man must search for all his goodness, for all the recommendations he can plead to heaven's

favour. O what a fool is man, when man dreams of righteousness and worth!

The springs of mercy then must be in God. But what are they? Turn again to an earthly king.

1. He sometimes pardons *from a love of mercy*; solely to gratify the feelings of a kind and compassionate heart. So also does God. "He pardoneth iniquity," says Micah; "he passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." No one loves mercy as God loves it. And of all the mercy he delights in, pardoning mercy he values the most. He is more ready to offer, than the perishing to accept it; more willing to speak peace to the offending, than they are to hear it. He deems his grace his wealth. He calls it his "riches," "the riches of his glory," his glorious riches.

2. A king may pardon from another motive. Perhaps he has just ascended his throne. He desires to be loved by his subjects; he wishes his reign to be glorious. He begins it therefore with an act of grace, a proclamation of pardon. And God pardons *to display his glory*; "for his own sake;" to make his perfections known, to put honour on his eternal Son, to fill a universe with his praise.

And how does he attain this end? By at once restoring a sinful world to his forfeited love? No.

He saves his Israel; one after another he takes his redeemed to heaven. We wonder at his grace as we think of beings so unworthy rejoicing in so holy a place; but it is not their salvation simply, which we admire. It is not that which raises the new and loudest hosannahs of his temple. It is the way in which he has saved them; it is the display he has made of his glory in the cross of his Son. The redeemed would have been happy, had he pardoned them without any satisfaction, but neither his love nor his justice would have been so highly exalted. Mercy would have shone forth, but not in her brightness, not in that glorious attire in which she now triumphs and reigns.

IV. We have now examined the forgiveness proclaimed to us. The most important matter however yet remains behind—*How ought we to treat this offer of pardon? to act with respect to it?*

Place yourselves within the walls of a prison. A sovereign enters it, and declares aloud that he has mercy, many free and full acquittals, to bestow. How would the inhabitant of every cell and dungeon act? Would he not hasten to throw himself at his monarch's feet, and eagerly exclaim, "Pardon me! O save me!" Imitate these men.

1. Make this your first concern, *to seek the pardon* offered you in the gospel. Labour to secure it for yourselves.

You answer perhaps, "We have done so." Then tell me, or rather tell your own consciences, the hour, the day, in which you first sought this mercy. Name the chamber, the field, the church, where you first smote on the breast, and, with the earnestness of a dying man supplicating life, cried for forgiveness. Is there such a place on the earth? Is there such an hour in your history? Some of you must answer, "No." Then how came this wonderful pardon yours? Brethren, it is not yours. None has ever found, who has not sought it. It is as free as the air you breathe; but they die unpardoned, who despise it. O that you knew your need of it! O that you knew its value! O that you knew the consequences of setting it at nought! You may do without it in some poor way, as long as you are within these prison walls, but you must soon leave them. "The Judge is at the door." Death is ready to call you away. Ere a few more years are gone, your body will be a lump of clay, and your soul will stand trembling before its God. O pity yourselves! To be going to such a place as the bar of heaven, and to be going there with the tidings of pardon sounding in your ears, and yet to care about any thing or every thing rather than

pardon!—none but the Spirit of God can cure such folly as this. At once implore him to work effectually in your hearts. Fall down this night before him, and on your bended knees make this your prayer, “Lord help me.” “Lord, save me.” “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

2. Are any of you already seeking this forgiveness? seeking it with a feeling, broken, imploring heart? Then stretch forth the hand of faith;—*take this pardon*. You have heard that it is full. God tells you it is free. He offers it to you, not because you have deserved it, nor because you are fit to receive it; but simply “for his own sake”—to indulge his mercy, to magnify his grace.

Cease then from all unbelieving reasonings, all proud objections. If you are conscious of your need of pardon, if above all things you desire pardon, if you despair of doing any thing whatsoever to deserve it, if you are really willing to receive it, as guilty, condemned, helpless, dying men; then you are as much warranted as sinners can be, to go, in Christ’s name, to the mercy-seat, and to take this complete and eternal pardon as your own. To you, as well as to the proud in heart, God says, “Put me in remembrance. Let us plead together.” “Tell me not for ever of thine unfitness for my kingdom, thy rebellion and

thy crimes. Tell me of my invitations to the guilty, and my promises to the lost. Tell me of the blood that was shed to save thee. Tell me of the tears, and prayers, and righteousness, the cross and passion of my Son. Shew me that thou canst trust my word. Only believe, and though thou wert as sinful as the cursing Peter, or as unworthy as the persecuting Saul, I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

3. Are any among you really in possession of this mercy? Then go once again for instruction to the prisoner's cell.

He has sought and obtained his monarch's pardon. The deed confirming it is in his hands. After a few months or years have past, he hears the same voice again proclaiming the same free mercy. How would such a man act? Would he hear that voice now with indifference? O no. It would remind him anew of his former danger. He would press the warrant of his safety closely to his heart; he would rejoice in it afresh. And how would he treat the author of his security? Would he despise him, because he was merciful? make light of his displeasure, because he had been set free by his grace? Would he turn traitor against him, because he was good? No. He would make the prison ring with his praises. He would be found amongst the very first at his

feet; he would be the last to depart from his sight. One minute, he would be calling on some thoughtless criminal to apply for his mercy; the next, he would be shouting with praise for some new pardon bestowed. Were he in his right mind, such a man would be the humblest and happiest, the most thankful, within those prison walls.

What shall I say more? Be like that man.
“Go and do thou likewise.”

SERMON XIV.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PARDONED.

ST. LUKE vii. 37, 38.

Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

A SINNER must be either pardoned or lost. We, brethren, are sinners. It is a question therefore, which no one of us can too earnestly put to his soul, Are my sins forgiven? Am I a pardoned, or an unpardoned transgressor of the law of heaven? Some of us perhaps are deeply anxious to have this momentous question truly answered.

How then shall we proceed? There is no easier way than to open our Bibles, to find there some transgressor whom God himself has declared forgiven, and to see how far his character corresponds with our own.

This text brings such a sinner before us—a woman of Capernaum or Nain. Her name is not mentioned. A few short verses contain all that we know of her history. But we are sure that we are right in turning to her for a standard. The blessed Jesus himself seems to hold her out to us for this purpose. He treats her with peculiar favour; he twice pronounces her forgiven. O may he bless our view of her character to the conviction or comfort of every heart!

I. She is first introduced to our notice, as entering a house wherein our Lord was sitting at meat. She came there, we are told, as soon as she knew that Jesus was there. It was a pharisee's house. She was a sinner; a known, open sinner; consequently an unbidden, and doubtless an unwelcome guest. But Christ was under that roof; and thither, regardless of consequences, did her eager feet swiftly carry her.

Here then becomes visible one of the first marks which distinguish the pardoned—*they seek Christ*; they come to him.

None others seek him. Not the careless—

they think not of him. Not the self-righteous—they can do without him. Not all whom conscience stings—thousands of these fly to a giddy world for relief; many try sacraments and prayers, and many more intemperance and sin; some exclaim for a time, with the astonished Peter, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;” a few, even on this side of the grave, cry out in the anguish of their hearts, with the unclean spirits, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” and then, like Judas, they rush unbidden to his bar.

But turn to the pardoned. “We would see Jesus,” is the language of them all. Nothing can satisfy, nothing can quiet them, but Christ. They seek him more than they seek any thing or every thing besides. There is not one of them, who does not grieve because his cold, wandering heart does not seek him more.

They seek him with different feelings;—sometimes, like the *Æthiopian* convert, rejoicing; sometimes, like Joseph and Mary, sorrowing; sometimes, like the woman who touched the hem of his garment, trembling; but whether happy or sad, in sickness or in health, in trouble or in joy, they are enquiring for Christ, they cannot rest till they find him. In his works, they look for him; in his house, they strive to draw near to him; in prayer, they thirst for his presence.

They prize his word, because it testifies of his grace ; their mercies are sweetened to them, because in their mercies they see his goodness ; they almost love their afflictions, because their afflictions bring him near to their souls. They long for death, for they know death to be the messenger which he sends to fetch his people to himself. And when they think of heaven, this is the prospect which makes their hearts burn the most ; not, “We shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ;” not, “We shall have done with sorrow and care ;” but, “We shall see Christ ; we shall be ever with the Lord.”

The pardoned seek Christ ;—that mark distinguishes them from the worldly. They seek him as a Saviour ;—that separates them from the pharisaic and proud. They seek him as a Sanctifier, as a King ;—that draws the line between them and all the abusers of his grace. They seek him as a Comforter ;—that removes them far away from those who are “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.”

II. But the angels seek Christ. We must go farther therefore in search of some other mark of the pardoned. We have it here—*they have a lively remembrance of their sins.*

Not a word indeed does this woman speak of her guilt ; but had she forgotten it ? One look

at her tells us that it was fresh in her memory, and almost bursting her heart. The pharisee deems her a sinner; a sinner, the Holy Spirit calls her; as a sinner, Christ himself addresses her; and could she have spoken, with what feeling would she have echoed the word, and styled herself a sinner, yea, of sinners the chief!

“This,” we may be told, “was her infirmity.” O that it were the infirmity of every transgressor on the earth! There are men who contend that pardoned sin should be forgotten. They know no more of the power of godliness than a stone. It can never be forgotten. As soon as it is cancelled in heaven, it is written “with a pen of iron,” fixed in the memory for ever. The murderer may forget his crimes, Judas his treason, and all hell its rebellion; but as long as the pardoned have minds that can work, and hearts that can feel, not all the sorrows of life, nor all the joys of heaven, nor all the ages of eternity, can blot out the remembrance of their guilt or weaken its power. It is as lasting as pardon itself. A sense of pardon keeps it alive. A man never rightly feels himself a sinner, till he looks with an eye of faith on Christ as his Saviour; till he begins to hope that wrath is escaped and heaven won. “Then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good,” says the Lord to Israel. And when was this remembrance to begin?

Not till he had "saved them from all their uncleannesses;" not till he had said to them, "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Look at the prodigal. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And what was the effect of all this tenderness? The very effect which the enjoyment of redeeming love produces in every breast. The first words which came from that contrite rebel, were a confession of his guilt. The son said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

And look higher. Why is that new song in heaven so loud? Why are the pardoned the most fervent there in their hosannahs and praise? Because they know that they are pardoned. They have taken up into heaven a remembrance of the sins which they committed upon earth, they compare their former state with their present, they see something of the amazing love which has saved them; and though the voice of all the angels were silenced, they could not hold their peace; they would still make the courts of heaven ring with this one sound, "Salvation;" they would still say, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us;" they would still cry aloud, "Unto

him that loved us, and washed us from our sins, be glory and dominion for ever."

III. But an objection may be raised even here—sin is remembered in hell, as well as in heaven; by many of the most ungodly on earth, as well as the pardoned. Something more peculiar yet is wanted to mark the forgiven transgressor. This penitent will supply it. *The pardoned remember their sins with softening and humbling sorrow.*

This can be said of none other. The angels that sinned, are as proud in their wretchedness now, as in the first hour of their fall. And who have been among the most high-minded and hardened on earth? They who have suffered the most from the anguish of remorse. Did Cain ever weep for sin? Did Pharaoh humble himself? Did Judas pray?

There is a sorrow for past transgressions, which proves no more in our favour, than a fever in the brain or a whirlwind in the air. No holy effects follow it: it may break our hearts, but it will never subdue them. No gracious dispositions produce it: a troubled conscience, a dread of shame, a fear of punishment—these are its sources. Death is its end. But look at that consciousness of guilt which distinguishes the accepted penitent. It lays the proudest in the dust.

This woman was once probably an object of admiration, if not of love. She was flattered perhaps by the great, and seated on high with the rich. Where is she now? At the feet of a despised Nazarene.

Here we must remember that the ancient Jews did not sit at their meals in the same posture as is usual among ourselves. They lay reclined on couches placed round their tables. The feet of Jesus, on this occasion, were consequently not on the ground, but on the couch whereon he was sitting. Near them this sinner took her station. "She stood at the feet" of Jesus. Mary sat at his feet when she listened to his words at Bethany. That was an humble station; but this woman stands in his presence, and stands at his feet. And not only so, she deems herself unworthy to appear before his face; she stands "behind him." And what is her errand there? She came to pour ointment on his head, but she cannot fulfil her purpose. Trembling diffidence restrains her hand. Her heart is melting within her. All she can do is to weep. She "stood at his feet behind him weeping." And the tears which she shed were not a few. They fell so fast, that they served to wash the blessed feet of her Lord. And they fell for a long time. The Saviour began to speak, but her tears did not cease. O what a scene was this! An angel could hardly have looked on

this weeping sinner, without wishing to share her tears.

Will any man say that they were the tears of folly ? that they flowed from merely natural causes, from softness of temper, or weakness of body or mind ? Then let him tell us whence flowed the tears of the manly Peter, when he had received that heart-piercing look from his injured Master. Let him tell us why Jacob “ wept and made supplication ;”—why the noble Paul served God “ with many tears ;”—why the tears of David were “ his meat day and night.” And then let him go a step farther. Let him tell us that a single tear for sin never falls from his own dry eye ; that all his life long his transgressions have never perhaps cost him a sigh. What answer shall we make him ? We would tell him to look upwards ; there dwells an offended Father ;—downwards ; there lies a dark and woe-worn hell ;—backward ; he will see mercies abused, patience wasted, and sins committed, which might make an angel mourn ;—forward ; a tremendous eternity ;—within him ; a polluted and ruined heart ;—without him ; a miserable and wicked world, a world which he has loved better than his God. If these things have not power to move him, we will tell him of an incarnate God ; of the Babe of Bethlehem ; of the Man of sorrows we have seen at Golgotha ; of the love, and tears, and cross of

Jesus Christ. We will tell him of mercy that even now does not abandon him; of grace that even yet is sounding in his ears, "Why will ye die?" And then if that man still makes scorn of the penitent transgressor's sorrow, we will say, and say it almost weeping, that we would not have our souls in his soul's stead for a thousand worlds.

Contrition, shame, humiliation, self-loathing, sorrow pungent, secret, and lasting—these are the marks which stamp a sinner for heaven. These are the things which make angels rejoice, as they look on a worm of the dust, and cause the Redeemer himself to call him blessed.

Do you need any proof that these sayings are true? O that your own hearts could afford it! O that your own experience rendered every other testimony needless! But hear the voice of Jehovah. He is speaking to Israel. "I will establish my covenant with thee;"—for what purpose? "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Hear a weeping Saviour's testimony; "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh."

IV. Here we might stop. Angels may seek

Christ, as well as the pardoned ; the condemned and lost may remember their sins ; but neither on earth, in heaven, or in hell, can this humiliation, this sorrow for sin be found, except in a pardoned heart. But there is one feature more in the character of the forgiven, which the conduct of this woman will not suffer us to overlook—*they have a peculiar love for Christ their Lord* ; such a love, brethren, as passes the understanding of a cold-hearted world ; a love that angels, in the very presence of their Lord, cannot feel.

We all say that Christ must be loved, but what is the love which men in general bear him ? Let them offer it one to another ; let a child offer such love to a parent, or a man to his friend ;—it would be scorned. It is cold, selfish, without feeling or life ; a love of profession and form, drawing at times a few words of respect from the lips, but never exciting one throb or one glow in the heart. It is less costly than the Hindoo's love for his idol ; it is almost as low as the African's love for the evil spirit at whose image he trembles.

“Seest thou this woman ?” said Jesus to Simon. It was her love, that he bid him mark. And what was that ? The homage which greatness extorts ? the respect which exalted goodness commands ? the obedience and service which a cold sense of duty reluctantly yields ? It was more. It was an emotion, a feeling ; a pure, and deep,

and all-conquering principle; an affection, such as Christ only can excite, and his Spirit only can give. It was that love to which pardon ever gives birth in a sinner's breast. Consider its character.

It was a *tender* love; a love which delights in its object, which seeks to be near it; a love which can say with the pardoned David, "In thy presence is fulness of joy." She came to Jesus; she stood near him; she kissed his feet.

It was a *warm* love. Censure, reproach, scorn, were nothing to her. She knew that they must await a sinner like her in a pharisee's house; but she heeded them not. Only let her stand at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, and the contempt of the whole world will never extort from her a sigh.

It was an *active* love. It said not a word, but it did all that it could. Simon himself ought to have washed the feet of Christ. The act would have been no more than the usual hospitality of the country required. But he was too haughty to perform such an office for such a guest. This woman could not bear the neglect. A flood of tears gushed from her eyes; and these supplied the place of the water, which the hands of others ought to have ministered.

It was a *self-denying* love. To pour oil on the head was another mark of respect sometimes offered in eastern countries to strangers. It was

less usual than washing the feet, and not, in ordinary cases, involving in its omission any breach of civility. This sinner did not expect Christ to be thus honoured in the house of a pharisee ; but shall he go without any mark of honour, which she can pay him ? No. Like Mary of Bethany, she takes a box of the most precious ointment which the country afforded, and hastens with it to her Lord. When by his side, she pours the ointment on the feet which the haughty pharisee had dishonoured, and then she “wipes them with the hairs of her head.” She deems no sacrifice too great, so that it honours Christ ; no service mean, that he will accept. Joyfully would she have forsaken all the world for him, and followed him as his servant all the days of her life. Nay, who can look at this woman, and not see at a glance, that she would have rejoiced to shed her heart’s blood for that Nazarene ?

And then the love which she bore to him, was a *delightful* love ; a love which made her happy. It mingled with her humiliation and shame, and took from them much of their bitterness. It almost turned her sorrow into joy. It made her very tears pleasant to her, the sweetest doubtless she had ever known. Of all the women on the earth, she perhaps at that moment was the happiest. It seems as though a step would have taken her to heaven ; as though she could in a

moment have broken out into its song, and opened her heart to its joys. And what can be more blessed, than to lie at the feet of Christ? to have our hard hearts melted there in penitence and love, and then to have that whisper from heaven enter the soul, "Thy sins are forgiven?" All that is higher than this, is not on earth; it must be looked for in the heavens.

This, brethren, is the sinner, whose character we proposed to examine. We have taken only a partial survey of it. There is enough however in what we have seen, to shew us *how many graces depend on a simple application to the Saviour for mercy.*

The humility, and contrition, and love, which we have been contemplating, were not merely the signs of a pardon conferred; they were the fruits of a pardon received. They all sprang out of that faith which brought this woman as a sinner to Christ; they all flowed from a belief of his pardoning grace. She "loved much, because her sins which were many, had been forgiven." And to what does our Lord attribute her safety, her peace, her salvation? To the very faith which brought her to him for pardon. He said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Some of us then may discover here why we are

so ungodly and comfortless—we are never on our knees at a footstool of mercy. Others may see why their graces are so languid and their hopes so low—they are seldom pleading the blood of Christ for forgiveness. When once they have caught a faint view of pardon, many appear to act as though they needed pardon no more. They no longer seek it. They imagine that in the new title of children of God, they have lost the character of sinners. This notion has been the bane of thousands. It has first puffed up and then ruined many a soul. It has clouded the views, and marred the comforts, and hindered the progress of many more. Renounce it, brethren. However sanctified and however blessed, you must enter heaven at last as sinners. O be content, while on earth, to stand before God as sinners. Is the hardness of your hearts a grief to you? Is their pride a burden? Is their want of love a sorrow and a shame? Do your souls ache for an assurance of pardon? O then seek this assurance, seek peace, seek love, seek a broken and contrite spirit, in this one prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

We learn also here *how to judge of the state of our own souls*. Twice does our Lord call this woman forgiven. Not satisfied with telling Simon that her guilt was cancelled, he says to her, unasked, “Thy sins are forgiven.” And when does

he say this? While she is standing behind him weeping; while she is washing his feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. We need not then go up to the skies to see whether our iniquities are blotted out from the records of heaven; nor must we trust to convictions, or impressions, or feelings. We must look into our hearts; we must examine our dispositions and lives; we must endeavour to discover in ourselves the marks which distinguish all the pardoned of God.

Are these marks, brethren, visible upon you? Have you beheld in the character of this silent penitent, any resemblance to your own? We will not say, do you seek Christ so earnestly as she sought him; is your remembrance of sin as lively as hers; your sorrow as humbling and softening; your love as tender, and warm, and active, and self-denying, and blessed? She had been a great sinner; and all her feelings and actions were in some degree proportioned to the greatness of her sin. We will come lower. Do you really love Christ more than you love any earthly friend, more than you love any earthly sin? Do you love him, because you have received from his hands a pardon bestowed by his mercy, and bought with his blood? Do you seek his favour and presence more than you seek money, or pleasure, or any thing which the world can give? Is

your remembrance of sin such as would make it as easy for you to cease to breathe, as to cease from prayer for forgiveness? Do you so mourn over it, as to feel it to be your chief sorrow? and are you so humbled under a sense of it, as to account it your chief, your only shame?

Trust not to any one of these things. They were all in this woman. Not a justified sinner has ever trodden the earth, in whom, in a greater or less degree, they have not all been found. If they are not in you; if your eye which can weep under worldly sorrows, is dry as a desert over spiritual evils, and your heart hard as a rock at the mention of spiritual mercies, be assured that the forgiveness you hope in, is not that which this woman received, is not that which Christ bestows. It is a forged pardon. It comes from the father of lies. And what will it profit you? No more than an acquittal written with his own hand, would profit a criminal who has been tried and condemned. It will answer no other purpose than to deceive, to harden, and destroy you.

Think of your situation, brethren. You are unpardoned sinners in a dying world, on the verge of a wretched, endless hell. "The Judge is at the door." The ministers of vengeance are at hand. A few hours only are left you for escape. O let them not run to waste. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way

with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto you, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."

SERMON XV.

THE AFFLICTED DAVID A PARDONED SINNER.

2 SAMUEL xii. 13.

Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.

THE closing years of the life of David are deeply, but most painfully interesting. His dreadful crimes, and the miseries which followed them, are such as we can never forget, and yet never think of without a shudder.

But there is some light amidst all this darkness. We learn from the text the readiness of Jehovah to blot out the most heinous offences; and who can look on the contrition of this pardoned sinner, without instruction and pleasure? Some of us may derive consolation even from his sufferings. They shew us that many things which we are prone to regard as the sure marks of an unpar-

doned condition, are yet sometimes found in the redeemed soul; are, in fact, no proofs, no indications whatsoever of a condemned state. To this single point then, let us confine our attention; and may the Holy Spirit bless our consideration of it to the comfort of every sorrowful heart!

I. *Heavy afflictions* are no signs of an unpardoned condition. If they were, who was ever more lost than David? "The Lord hath put away thy sin," said the prophet to him; but from that hour judgments followed him to the grave. You remember the history of his woes. They were such as make a father's ear tingle as he hears of them. They almost broke that poor monarch's heart. But in the lowest depths to which he sunk, the words of Nathan concerning him were as true, as though he had been happy on his throne. The iniquities of David were forgiven.

There are times when we find it hard to believe this truth. A light and short affliction seldom much depresses us, for we can easily reconcile it with a Father's faithfulness; but when blow succeeds to blow, when our troubles are peculiar, and long continued, and harrowing, our hearts begin to fail us. We think that a gracious God never can love the creatures whom he so severely wounds. We could not so afflict our children; we are ready

to conclude therefore, that were we the children of a heavenly Father, he would not so afflict us: our once peaceful assurance of his pardoning mercy gives way, and is succeeded by perplexity and doubt.

But where all this time are the declarations of our Bible gone? We have only to bring our afflictions to the standard of that holy book, and their character is in a moment changed. The Holy Spirit foresaw all our fears, as well as our sufferings; and what is his language to us under them? "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children; My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." "But not as we are scourged," you answer. Then turn again to that faithful word of testimony. Read in it the history of the church which was bought with blood. Is it not a record of afflictions, such as you never witnessed? And whose afflictions, whose trials were all these? They were the portion of men, "of whom the world was not worthy;" of men who, while on earth, were the most beloved of God, and who in heaven are nearest to his throne.

When your troubles, brethren, are more bitter than those of David, more numerous than Paul's,

and more hard to be borne than the desolate Job's, then regard them as witnesses against you. Till then, look on them rather as manifestations of kindness. They will not prove you forgiven, but they will prove that you are not abandoned. They are no more the marks of condemnation, than the pruning knife is a sign that the tree must fall. Does the refiner often heat his furnace for the metal which he knows to be worthless? Do you watch over and correct year after year a stranger's child?

II. To all this perhaps you have an answer ready. "We know," you say, "that if we are Christ's, afflictions are a part of our inheritance. They alone could never excite one fear in our souls. This is the cause of our misgivings—we have no consolations under them. All without us is trouble, and all within us is darkness. Were we among the pardoned, would it, could it be thus?" Turn again to the experience of David. It tells us, as plainly as the most comfortless affliction can tell us, that *a want of spiritual consolation* under calamities is no evidence of an unpardoned state.

It is true that the Lord Jesus Christ has taught his people to expect special consolations in special sufferings. It is true also, that their most afflicted hours have sometimes been their happiest. But is it not as true that they have often

walked in darkness and had no light? Their feelings under afflictions have been as various as their afflictions themselves. What different feelings, for instance, have they manifested at the death of children! "Blessed be the name of the Lord," was the exclamation of Job, when the tidings were brought to him of the loss of all his offspring. "Aaron held his peace," when his two sons were consumed. The end of Hophni and Phineas could not move old Eli. It was not till he heard that the ark of God was taken, that he fell from his seat. But turn to David. His infant sickens and dies. This was his first affliction after his fall. A ray of comfort seems to have cheered him under it. But where was David's spiritual joy, when he "tare his garments" at the news of Amnon's death, and "lay on the earth," and "wept very sore?" Did his consolations abound, when his chamber rung with the sounds, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

And think of the psalms which are every sabbath on our lips. Most of these are the compositions of this pardoned sinner. Is it possible for words to express more pure, unmixed, comfortless misery, than that which gives vent to its wretchedness there? "I am troubled," he says; "I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day

long." "I am weary with my groanings: all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." "As for the light of mine eyes, it is gone from me." "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" And hear the piteous complaints of the disconsolate Heman. "My soul," says he, "is full of trouble." "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps." "Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me?" Job too bewails departed comforts, and Jeremiah groans in unbroken darkness.

And shall we forget the exceeding great sorrow of his soul, who "knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth?" The spotless Jesus himself, in the hour of his deepest misery, was comfortless. The most piercing cry that ever came from human lips, came from the holiest; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

III. A want of consolation then is no proof of a condemned state: neither, thirdly, is *a troubled conscience*.

"We read in our Bibles," say some, "that they who are justified by faith, have peace with God. We are told also, that they have peace within; that the blood which cleanses, quiets

them. Christ himself promises them rest ; we see that some of them enjoy it. There was a time when we ourselves were easy ; but now a prisoner on the rack might almost pity us. Sins committed months and years ago, sins which we thought blotted out of God's remembrance and our own for ever, are now as fresh in our memory as though they were not an hour old. They follow us wherever we go. We cannot forget them. They are a terror to us by night, and a burden by day. We could be content to be comfortless ; we could welcome the sharpest tribulations ; but this wounded spirit, this evil conscience, who can bear ? It is the scourge of an angry God ; it is a mark of his wrath." No, brethren ; an accusing conscience is a mark of nothing but this, that you are sinners, and that sin is a more evil and bitter thing, than you once thought it. It cannot of itself prove you forgiven, for the guilty in hell are "tormented in this flame." Much less can it prove you condemned. Thousands have groaned under it, who are now peaceful in heaven ; and thousands more, who will soon be in heaven, it often lays on the ground in anguish.

Your sense of guilt may be exceedingly painful ; and what was David's ? The agonies of his soul pass all description. Words fail him, as he attempts to express them. In the thirty-eighth psalm, he compares his recollections of sin to

arrows darting into his flesh, to a wasting disease, to rankling wounds, to broken and aching bones.

The sufferings of your spirit may be frequent. His were constant. "Thine arrows," says he, "stick fast in me." "There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin." "My sorrow is continually before me."

"But David," you answer, "was supported. He had strength to bear his misery. Ours is sometimes overwhelming, intolerable." Was David's light? Did he think it easy to be borne? "Thy hand," he cries, "presseth me sore." "Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." "I am feeble and sore broken. I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

"But my sins," you reply again, "are so abominable, so loathsome: the remembrance of them fills me with self-abhorrence; it covers me with unutterable shame." Turn once again to this troubled king. "My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness." "My loins are filled with a loathsome disease." Hear too what the astonished Ezra says; "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." And hear the upright Job; "I abhor myself."

And pass from the prophets of old to the holy

men who wrote our Prayer Book. Did they deem convictions of sin tokens of condemnation? Why then have they laboured so much to keep these convictions alive? Why have they taught us to call ourselves no fewer than six times every sabbath, "miserable offenders, miserable sinners?" And what is the language which they put into our lips at the table of the Lord? With the emblems of his blessed body and blood before us—the body which, they tell us, was given, and the blood which, they say, was shed for us—they call us not at once to a song of exultation or a burst of praise. They bid us bewail our manifold sins; they bid us say of them what you, and such as you, are the only persons who can say without a mockery of heaven, "The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable." And what perhaps is the feeling of some envied neighbour who is kneeling by your side, or of the minister whose voice is uttering this confession in your ears? He is wishing for a more heart-felt sense of its meaning: he is praying for a greater measure of the compunction it describes.

O happy are you, if your only cause of fear is a troubled spirit! Wherever God bestows a pardon, he always first bestows this; and even when his pardon has been welcomed to the heart, sooner or later he generally bestows this gift

again. And it is not a useless gift. Pardon teaches us the extent of Jehovah's mercy ; this painful sense of guilt shews us the awfulness of his justice, the fearfulness of his wrath. By the one, he exalts himself ; by the other, he abases and empties us. He pardons our sins, that we may be saved from them ; he suffers us to taste their wormwood and their gall, that we may value salvation. He takes us to heaven, that we may magnify his grace ; he shews us the bitterness of sin in our way to it, that we may not enter heaven with a cold heart and a silent tongue ; that when we are there, we may praise the Lamb that was slain with a love proportioned to the greatness of the evil from which he has delivered us, and with a fervour suited to the weight of the curse which he has borne.

IV. It may be that even yet the cause of your disquietude has not been touched. It is not trouble, it is not darkness, it is not past guilt, that makes you deem yourselves accursed ; it is present sin. You have great temptations from without, and strong corruptions within. Satan harasses you. Your wearied soul is a scene of perpetual conflict. You tell us that sin when remitted is not thus powerful ; that where Christ is a Saviour, he is a Sanctifier also. You infer therefore that you have no interest in his salvation.

We will go then a step farther, and say without fear of misleading you, that *a painful sense of inward corruptions* is not inconsistent with pardoning mercy.

But let us be cautious here. If there is any one lust which, day after day and year after year, leads you captive; any one ungodly practice, in which you habitually indulge; if the sin which is your fear, is at the same time your delight, ever committed with greediness, though sometimes repented of with anguish; let an angel from heaven declare you to be pardoned, we will appeal to the written testimony of God, and say that the truth is not in him; that you have no more reason to regard yourselves forgiven, than a dying man has to think himself in health. But if sin is opposed, as well as felt; if its strivings within you lead to prayer instead of iniquity; if, through the Spirit, the base passions of your nature are habitually overcome; if sin is your grief and abhorrence, as well as terror; then, brethren, we are as sure as the Bible can make us, that the warfare in your soul, though painful, and tumultuous, and unceasing, is no mark of the displeasure of heaven; is as plain a token as God can give you, that he has "blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins."

It is true the holy Jesus sanctifies all he redeems. By these conflicts he is sanctifying you.

They will end in the victor's shout, and the conqueror's crown. They will end in the purity, as well as the blessedness of glory. Where is David now? Among the holiest and happiest around the throne of his God. But what was his state when on earth?—his state, not in that awful year when an offended God gave him up to himself, but his state when sovereign mercy “renewed him again to repentance,” and a messenger from God had pronounced him forgiven? He himself shall describe it; “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And did none of this inbred pollution remain? His prayer will tell us; “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

“But David,” it may be said, “was just recovering from a polluting fall.” Turn then to the blameless Paul, to him of whom, after his conversion to God, the Holy Ghost has not left on record one sin or one folly. What says his experience? It goes farther than we have yet ventured to lead you. It tells you that there may be conflict in a pardoned heart; and it tells you more—that there may be in that very heart, amidst all its conflicts, a sense of forgiveness, a triumphant assurance of pardon. It tells you that a man

may groan under a sense of sin, and yet look on himself as an heir of glory. "I delight," says he, "in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? And what does he add? "I am unpardoned; I am lost?" No; "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And for what does he thank God? For his corruptions? for the dreadful burden under which he groaned? In no wise;—for a deliverance which he foresaw and almost enjoyed; for a conquest which was so certain, that he already speaks of it as his own. "The sting of death," says he in another place, "is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here we must stop. The sum of all you have heard is briefly this—I am not to look on my guilty soul as pardoned because heavy afflictions are sent me, or spiritual consolation is denied; because a troubled conscience weighs me down, or my own evil heart torments me; but if the Holy Spirit has stamped on me those marks which the redeemed have ever borne, none of these

things can weaken their testimony ; no, nor all of them together prove me condemned. Troubled and comfortless, I am warranted to lift up my wretched eyes to heaven, and say, "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin."

But who, under such discouragements, can raise his confidence so high? We can listen to the Christian minister or friend who tells us that these things ought not to cast us down. It is easy to understand his reasoning, and impossible perhaps to gainsay one of his words ; but what good has he done us? What hope has he kindled in our souls? None. Our sins are as heavy as though he had not uttered a word, our hearts as sinking, our misgivings as strong. Learn here then *the importance of a simple faith in the Redeemer's blood.*

There are times, brethren, when every effort to discover our interest in the divine mercy will fail us. Sin may cloud the evidences of our safety ; or the Holy Spirit, for gracious purposes, may cease to shine on them ; or infirmity of body or of mind may hide them from our sight. We may search our hearts till they ache in the work ; we may compare ourselves with one pardoned transgressor after another, and the only fruit of our enquiries may be thicker darkness, more painful uncertainty. How then, in these straits, shall we

act? How did David act? He applied to Jehovah for pardon. At first he examined, he reasoned, he "took counsel," as he says, in his soul; but what could reasoning do for a sinner like him? What could self-examination do, but unveil to him more disheartening views of his crimes? He tells us that these things did nothing to comfort him, that he had "sorrow in his heart daily." He flies at length as a poor, sunk, helpless transgressor, to his God, and throws himself on his mercy. He seeks peace through pardon. "Have mercy upon me, O God," says he, "according to thy loving-kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." And what followed? Years perhaps of sorrow; but before he died, his guilty lips spake yet again of pardoning grace; "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." And on his dying bed, we see him calmly reposing in the covenant and salvation of his God.

Let us follow his footsteps. Cease for a while, brethren, from your wearisome enquiries into your own state. If they have discovered to you how little you can do for yourselves, how utterly unable you are to obtain present peace, much less everlasting salvation, they have done their work. It is a blessed work. Amid conflicts and fears,

they are not likely to do more. Nor need they. The great Saviour of sinners is both able and willing to accomplish all you desire. Look out of yourselves to him. And for what purpose? For the very same purpose that David, and Paul, and all who are in heaven, have looked to him; for the same purpose that you yourselves have looked to him in the days that are gone—for the remission of your sins. Instead of asking whether you are pardoned or lost, cast yourselves at the feet of him by whom all the lost may be pardoned, and in whom only the pardoned can be safe. Approach him as sinners; as sinners, embrace anew his promises; as sinners, hope in his mercy, and righteousness, and blood. This is the way to heaven, and there is no other way to hope or quietness on earth. In the very first moment in which the assurance will not prove a curse to you, he will send, not a prophet, but his Holy Spirit to say to you, in a voice which you cannot misunderstand, “The Lord hath put away thy sins.” “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

There is a lesson also here for *the peaceful Christian*. Are you free from the fears which perplex many of your brethren? Do you live in the enjoyment of “a good hope through grace?” Then look on David, and behold *what havoc sin can occasion in the noblest mind*.

There was a time when this was the happiest

of men. He had his troubles, but there was no sting in them; he did not heed them. His song from day to day was a song of joy, of thankfulness for mercies past, and of the liveliest hope of higher mercies yet to come. But turn your eyes on "the sweet psalmist of Israel" now. O what a mournful change! Not a single note of happiness comes from that once cheerful harp. All is complaint, distraction, and misery. And what has wrought this change? That accursed thing which can turn a paradise into a desert. The man has been feeding on ashes. He has forgotten on his throne the law which was so dear to him in the fields of Bethlehem, and on the mountains of Judæa. Sin has poisoned his happiness. It has made him a wreck. Look not at his wretched family in order to see what this tremendous evil can do. Look not at his dying babe, his injured daughter, his wicked sons, his murdered Amnon, his lost Absalom. Look not at the monarch driven by his own child from his throne, and followed with the curses of a rebel, as he flies, weeping and barefoot, to the wilderness. Look at the ravages of sin within that man. What has it done there? It has ruined a peace which God himself had given him from above; it has put an end to a joy which was almost divine; it has darkened the hopes which once soared to heaven. It has done more. It has made reflection a terror

to him, conscience a scourge, life a burden, death dreadful. It has thrown down the once firm, spiritual, towering mind of David, and turned it into a ruin.

Where then is the mind which can open itself to sin, and not be overthrown by it? Not yours, brethren; not mine; no, nor an angel's. It would be easier to bear the ravages of the plague, and not be weakened; easier to pass through the flames of a furnace, and escape unhurt. Sin never brings guilt on a Christian's conscience, without bringing pollution into his mind; without, in the end, weakening its powers, debasing its affections, blasting its hopes, and withering its joys. Would you continue happy? Continue holy. "Remember David and all his troubles." Keep your hearts "with all diligence." "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." "Walk in the Spirit." "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts."

SERMON XVI.

THE MESSAGE SENT TO ST. PAUL IN THE STORM.

ACTS xxvii. 23, 24.

There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar.

A CHRISTIAN can often bring hope, where other men can bring none. His fellow-sinners make light of him; perhaps they do him much wrong; but when trouble comes, they learn his value. They generally find him to be their best comforter, and sometimes their only friend.

Paul was now in the hands of his enemies. They were carrying him as a prisoner from Jerusalem to Rome. In their way thither, they encountered a storm, which raged so violently and so long, that all hope of safety was at last gone. And now was the time for the Lord Jesus Christ

to put honour upon his persecuted servant, and to bring glory to himself. He sends down an angel from heaven to assure him of his safety. He tells him too, that for his sake, every life in the vessel should be preserved. And then the apostle comes forth, and proclaims to his despairing companions the joyful tidings he had received.

I. If we would make his words useful to ourselves, we must bear in mind the character of the man who spoke them. Let us begin then with *the description which the apostle has here given us of himself.*

This is short, but it is full of meaning; so humble, that the meanest Christian may lay claim to it; and yet so honourable, that the most spiritually minded can wish for nothing higher. It seems indeed to be the very description which an angel would rejoice to own. Were one of those exalted beings asked to tell us of his glory and his greatness, what could he do more, than take up the language of this storm-tossed voyager, point to the throne of the Holy One, and say, "His I am, and him I serve?"

1. All the creatures which his hands have formed, are God's; but Paul was his in a special manner, in the same peculiar sense in which his own heaven and throne are called his.

If we ask how he became so, he himself in-

forms us. "By the grace of God," says he, "I am what I am." There was a time when he was the slave of sin, and consequently the property of Satan, "a blasphemer and a persecutor;" no more the Lord's, than the spirits of the lost are his. The glory of the Saviour seemed to require his destruction; the church perhaps expected it; but he had long been set apart to give to mercy a more glorious triumph, than vengeance could have found in him. In the everlasting covenant of grace, this very Saul had been given to the Lord Jesus Christ, as one whom he was to redeem and save. He did redeem him; he bought him with his own most precious blood, and made him all his own. In order to shew how much sin he can pardon, how much enmity subdue, and how much grace impart, he first laid this persecutor trembling at his feet, and then sent him through the world, to labour, and suffer, and die, for his name's sake.

2. Paul too well knew the mercy which he had obtained, and the end for which he was destined. The grace bestowed on him "was not in vain." He gave himself to the Lord, who had so freely chosen and redeemed him. Hence he goes on to say that he "served" him.

We all know what it is to serve the world. It is to have our hearts much taken up with it, to be very careful and troubled about it, to toil early

and late for what it has to give. What is there, which some of us will not do for the sake of this poor world? If need be, we would wear ourselves out in its service. So the apostle served Christ. He made his glory the great business of his life. Keeping ever in his remembrance the price at which he had been bought, he felt that he was not his own, that he was the Lord's, entirely and constantly the Lord's, and therefore bound to "glorify him with his body and with his spirit which were his."

Such was Paul, and such is every real Christian. He has obtained the same mercy, the same eternal, free, and rich grace, that this man found; and it produces in him the same effects. If then I would know whose I am, let me only ask myself, Whom do I serve? Where is my heart? Is it with Christ in heaven? or is it tied down to my enjoyments, or cares, or griefs, on earth? What is my life? Is it a ceaseless toiling to get more of the world? or is it something higher and better? a daily crucifixion to the world, a living unto God, a preparation for the work and pleasures of the skies?

II. Consider, in the next place, *the situation of the apostle at this time*. And this was not the situation in which we might have supposed the Lord would place one who was so dear to him, and who so faithfully served him. He is the

Lord's, and yet he is in the power of heathen persecutors. He served the Lord, and yet the very winds and waves which the Lord commands, are threatening to destroy him. Jonah met with a storm, but he was flying from his work. Paul is in a tempest on his way to fresh labours in his Master's service.

I. We learn here, that *no devotedness to Christ will save us from tribulation*. Many of our afflictions are sent to reprove us for our want of this devotedness ; to stir us up ; to remind us of neglected duties and forgotten vows. But very severe trials will sometimes come upon us, when our hearts are most constrained by a Saviour's love, when we seem to be doing, and risking, and suffering all we can for Christ.

Our love for him brings on us the ill usage of the world. We bear it, for we expect him to smile on us, to recompense us for the world's hatred by peculiar tokens of his regard. Our expectation is in general realized. But sometimes in the hour of persecution, he hides his face from us. He does more. He sends us tribulation. He wounds, even when Satan harasses and the world smites.

2. We are taught also here, that some of *the trials with which the Lord visits his people, seem at times to hinder, rather than fulfil his designs and promises*. It was the will of Christ, that Paul

should preach his gospel at Rome. His apostle knew this. But from time to time, various circumstances arose, which threatened to defeat the divine purpose. They were overruled, and Paul at length is safe in a vessel which is carrying him with a fair wind to Rome. Who now can hinder the fulfilment of the Saviour's promise? The Saviour himself hinders it. He raises against this vessel a tempest, which first drives it from its course, and is now ready to overwhelm it.

It is often thus, brethren. Some of the afflictions which are sent us from heaven, appear for a long time as though they would turn us from the way to heaven. They discourage us. They obstruct our usefulness. They bring to nought our best laid schemes for the Redeemer's glory. They force us to cease from this or that work which had begun to prosper in our hands, and which we had almost persuaded ourselves the Lord had pledged himself to bless. Look at the pious parent. He is laid perhaps for years on a bed of suffering, hardly able to speak to the children whom he longs to train up for God. The strength of the faithful minister deserts him in his work. He can do no more than look on and weep, where he had been among the first to labour and rejoice. The zealous missionary sickens and dies among the heathen whom he had forsaken all to save.

What use then are we to make of these truths? *They bid us expect storms.* They tell us that if ever we reach heaven, we must pass to it over an ocean where no one ever yet found rest, an ocean which the Lord himself often disturbs.

We are ready to ascribe our trials to ourselves. Many of them, yea, most of them are of our own creating; our sins are their authors. But the winds which tossed Paul, were not raised by Paul's sins. They were sent forth by another hand.

We are prone also to blame others for what we suffer. We trace our troubles to the situations in which we are placed, or to the persons with whom we are connected. We may be in part right; but let us wait a while. Circumstances may alter. We may be as far from all the persons and things that now pain us, as though they had ceased to exist. But are our troubles gone? In no wise. They have changed their form; but we have troubles still, as real and great as ever. Paul is in danger of his life from the persecuting Jews. He appeals to Cæsar, and escapes their malice. But where is he now? On a raging sea in an almost foundering bark. Is his life safe? Every billow seems to rise for his destruction.

The fact is, we are not only in a world of trouble, but, if we are the Lord's, we are the servants of a Master who was himself a man of

sorrows, and who is determined to make his people like him. What did he say of Paul when he first made him his own? "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." He says the same to all his disciples; "Ye shall have tribulation." Look at the covenant which he has formed with his chosen. What read we there? An exemption from sorrow? No. Among the blessings which it promises, stands this—written in characters so plain that he who runs may read it—"tribulation," "much tribulation." Hence David ascribes some of his bitter sufferings, not to the vengeance, no, nor even to the fatherly love of his God, but to his faithfulness; "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." And the more the Lord loves any of his servants, the more of this tribulation they are likely to receive; so that if we would find the people whom he most delights to honour, we must look for them where we here find Paul, in storms; where we so often find David, in the lowest depths; where Christ himself was found, in poverty, in reproach, in sorrows. But none of them are forsaken there.

III. Consider, thirdly, *the message which was sent to the apostle while he was tossing on the waves.*

1. The first circumstance remarkable in this, is *the person who received it*. It was not sent to the sailors who were managing the vessel—they were heathens. But why was Paul the only one in this crowded ship, to whom the angel said, “Fear not?” There were others in it who were the Lord’s. Luke, we know, was there, and yet no angel comes to cheer Luke’s heart in this trying hour. We may wonder for a moment at this seeming partiality—we often wonder when we should rather learn—but there was no injustice in it.

It is the righteous will of Christ to give his richest consolations to his most devoted servants. Comfort, as well as pardon, is all of grace. In administering it, “the God of all comfort” acts just as he acts in dispensing pardon—like a sovereign, who “divideth to every man severally as he will.” And yet he acts also like a God of faithfulness. He suffers some of his people to mourn while others rejoice—we see and own his sovereignty; and then he manifests the equity of his ways, by making the holiest of his servants the happiest. “Them that honour me,” says he, “I will honour.” In the time of trouble he fulfils his promise. He shews that he loves them most, who serve him best.

2. But turn from the man who received this consolation, to *the messenger who brought it*.

The Lord generally comforts them that are his, by means of their fellow-sufferers. Thus he had often comforted Paul. But in this stormy and fearful night, he sends down to him a comforter from heaven. "There stood by me this night the angel of God, saying, Fear not."

And what does the appearance of this angel teach us? A most encouraging truth—*They who suffer for Christ, generally obtain the most signal marks of his favour when they suffer the most.* In peculiar trials, they have peculiar consolations. The reason is plain—they most need them in those seasons. And not only so, but they most seek them. Affliction brings sin to remembrance. The remembrance of sin weighs down the soul; and then, sinking and trembling, it is forced to turn again in its anguish to its crucified Lord. We go to him for pardon; he gives us pardon, and, with pardon, quietness and rest.

Besides, trouble makes us feel our weakness. It shews us too the weakness of all around us. It lays bare the emptiness of all earthly comforts, and the feebleness of all earthly props. We look within and without for relief, and there is none. Refuge fails us. We are constrained to cast ourselves on Christ. And though we go to him as our last Friend, we find him our best. He thinks of his own past sorrows, and he pities ours. He upholds us; he gives us strength to suffer. Some-

times he does more. He pours into our hearts a consolation so refreshing, so quieting, so unutterably sweet, that we bless the trouble which has made it ours.

Are you strangers to affliction, brethren? Then are you strangers to some of the highest consolations that are known on earth. A man can never fully understand how Christ can comfort, till he has tried him in the depths of sorrow, till he has taken to him a wearied, bleeding, and almost bursting heart, which none other can ease or heal.

Turn to the saints of old. An angel was repeatedly sent down to Daniel; and where did he find him? At one time, in a den of lions; at another time, in sackcloth and ashes, mourning over the transgressions of Israel. The aged John is banished to Patmos. He had before seen the Son of man in his humiliation; he sees him there in his greatness. Look at St. Stephen. While surrounded with the betrayers and murderers of his Lord, the heavens suddenly open before his wondering eyes, and shew him all the glory of God, and his crucified Master standing, as though waiting to receive him, at his side. Paul's own experience was the same. As the "sufferings of Christ abound in us," said he, "so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

But we need not go to prophets, apostles, and

martyrs. Some of you have had in your own hearts a confirmation of this truth. When have you seen most clearly that you are the Lord's? Which of your days on earth have resembled most the days of heaven? Have they not been those when the God who loves you, has brought you the most low? when other comforters and other refuges have all given way, and you have been sinking? Has not affliction found you cheerless, and left you happy? By quickening your faith and warming your love, has it not revived the hopes which had languished, and the joys which had well nigh withered? In a word, have there not been times, in which, like the ark of Noah, you have been raised higher and higher towards heaven, as the floods have lifted themselves up and increased?

And what does all this say to you? It tells you to look on affliction as the forerunner of mercy, to expect signal blessings in signal calamities; not to give up all for lost, when the clouds gather, and the winds rise, and the tempest lowers, but to wait with patience for that still small voice, which will sooner or later be heard in the storm, saying unto you, "Fear not."

3. There is one point more to be noticed in the message sent to the apostle—the purport of it, *its meaning*. Though brought from heaven in so unusual a manner, if we except the promise of

safety for his companions, there was nothing new in it. It amounted to no more than this, "Thou must be brought before Cæsar." "Thou shalt go safe to Rome." And with this purpose of his Lord, Paul was already acquainted. Before he left Jerusalem, Christ himself stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

Here also is instruction for us. *The Lord often comforts the afflicted by simply reminding them of his promises.* We need no voice from heaven in order to make us happy. There is enough in the Bible to cause every heart in this wretched world to burn with joy. No angel could bring to us more gracious tidings than are published there. We are told of pardon for the guilty, sanctification for the polluted, rest for the burdened soul, salvation for the lost, Christ for a comforter, heaven for a home. And we are told of these things for this express purpose, to give us consolation. So Paul himself informs us; "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope."

If then we are comfortless in trouble, the fault lies in ourselves. We forget our Bibles. Either we do not remember, or we do not believe the promises of Christ. In compassion therefore to

our infirmities, the Saviour recalls our attention to these promises, not by means of an angel, but by a higher messenger, the Holy Ghost. He “opens our understandings, that we may understand” them; he opens our hearts to believe them. How did he comfort his sorrowful disciples in their way to Emmaus? “He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” And how, brethren, has he comforted you? You have been in trouble. At first perhaps you were exceedingly cast down. Afterwards however you became tranquil, if not happy. What wrought this change? In almost every instance, it was wrought by the word of God. Some promise which you had read a thousand times before, was sent home for the first time to your heart. You discovered in it a meaning and a sweetness which you never saw before, which at once surprised and gladdened you. You felt, as you thought of it, that you could take this grateful declaration of the prophet as your own, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.” Let your experience become your teacher. Go to the promises for consolation. Treasure them up in your memory. Feed on them. Live on them. Learn to say with the rejoicing David, “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

There is still more in this history to claim your attention. Mark the credit which Paul gave to the message he received. It was prompt, simple, full; a taking of the great God at his word; a confident expecting of the promised deliverance in the face of seeming impossibilities. "I believe God," says he, "that it shall be even as it was told me."

And mark the fruits of this faith, the effects it produced. It kept him tranquil on the billows. Working by love, it made him anxious for the present comfort, as well as the future deliverance of his companions. "Be of good cheer," says he to them; "I pray you to take some meat, for this is for your health." It caused him to set a high value on the means of safety, nay, to deem them absolutely necessary for their preservation. Not a sailor would he allow to desert the labouring vessel. "Except these abide in the ship," cries he, "ye cannot be saved."

And mark also the faithfulness of Paul's Lord. The ship is wrecked, but every passenger is saved. "It came to pass that they escaped all safe to land."

Now, brethren, turn to yourselves. Are you the Lord's? Do you serve him? There is but little difficulty in pointing out those who are not the Lord's. All are comprehended in this class,

who are living “without God in the world;”—such of you as know nothing of your awful departure from him, the natural enmity of your hearts against him, your close alliance with his wretched foe;—such of you as have never sought the Redeemer’s mercy and the Spirit’s grace;—such as have not torn away their hearts from the world and sin, and given them to Christ;—not the ungodly, profane man only, but he also who feels no need of a Saviour, no love for him, no zeal in his cause; he who is alive in every thing that concerns his own interest or pleasure, but dead as a stone to whatever concerns a redeeming Lord.

Are you men of this character, brethren? Then let me implore you to remember in what a world you are living, over what a treacherous sea your frail bark is passing. All may be sunshine and quiet now, but how long will the calm last? Perhaps not an hour. No angel may be sent from heaven to disturb it; but before this day shall end, a messenger or a letter may bring you tidings, which will make your soul “like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest.” And what if it should be otherwise? What if “to-morrow be as this day?” Will an hour of trouble never come? Will your friends and children never die? Will sickness never bring you low, and pain never rack you? Will a false world never deceive you, nor a cruel world wound you? There

are miseries even on this side of the grave, which the Christian, with the Bible for his support and heaven for his hope, sometimes finds it hard to bear. O how can you bear them, with no prop to lean on, no refuge to flee to, no hope for your soul? And is not death at hand, and is not eternity near? Is it a trifle, think you, to stand at the judgment seat of the living God?

Look at the case of these mariners. The sea was calm, and they were determined to set sail. Paul warned them; he told them of future storms and dangers; but they heeded him not. You know what followed. They were saved, but how? By a deliverance that was almost miraculous; there was not one among them all, who would not have given all he possessed to be safe on land. And what is there which you will not be ready to give for an interest in Christ, when the hour of deep affliction, and death, and judgment, comes? What can you do without it? Where can you look for comfort? where for safety? To God? You are living without him now, and must suffer and perish without him then. There is only one way of safety for you; "Remember now thy Creator, while the evil days come not." Become at once the Lord's, and serve him. Seek reconciliation with him through the blood of his Son. Instead of asking with the ungodly Pharaoh, "Who is Lord over us?" say with David, "O

my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord."

Has the Lord already made you his own? Then this probably is the scripture which often seems to describe you best—"afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." What think you in such seasons of the consolations of Christ? Do you seek them? Do you expect them? Many of us must answer, "No." We think of them when we enjoy them, when we comparatively but little need them; but when our need is the greatest, when the storm rises, we lose sight of them in clouds and darkness. Like Peter, we look on the boisterous waves, till we can no longer see him who rules them. The consequence is, "we are afraid;" we are wretched, when we might be peaceful.

We must struggle against this evil, brethren. Despondency can in no case be useful. On the contrary, it is in every case injurious; paralyzing, chilling, tormenting. And how is it to be overcome? Only in one way—by a more simple and lively faith in the promises of heaven. And what are these? This is the first and greatest of them all, "Thou shalt be saved." And what is salvation? A long eternity with Christ at the close of a life which is perhaps already far spent, and which at first was only as "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth

away." What can we desire more? But more is provided for us. We are promised refreshments in the storm, as well as a quiet and secure haven at the end of it. Our present portion is not made up of troubles only. He who bought us with his blood, has purchased comforts to gladden, as well as sorrows to humble us. They are all in his covenant of grace. He calls upon us to think of them, to seek them, to expect them. He has told us that we shall have them. He has promised us, not the short visit of an angel, but his own immediate, constant presence. It is his own voice which says to us in the darkness, "Fear not, for I am with thee." His own lips have declared, nay, his own hand has written the gracious words, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Let the winds blow then, and let the rain descend and the billows swell; let all without be commotion, and all within be weakness; where is the servant of Christ, who will not say, with the tempest-driven Paul, "I believe God, and am comforted? He has made me his own; and he will not forsake the work of his own hands. He has given me many precious promises; he has enabled me to believe them; he has taught me to remember them; and will he himself forget them? Never. I have waited for him, and he will save me. I am his, and he will keep me. Where he is, there also shall his servants be. I shall see his face; these eyes shall behold my God."

SERMON XVII.

THE FOOLISH VIRGINS.

ST. MATTHEW xxv. 8.

Our lamps are gone out.

THESE are simple words ; some of us may deem them trifling ; but when considered in their spiritual meaning, they are very solemn and affecting. No one indeed can think seriously of them without offering up a most earnest prayer, that whatever be the sorrows awaiting him, he may never experience the anguish of using this complaint as his own.

Are any of us then in danger of falling into this misery ? We are. Which of us ? All ; more especially those who think themselves the farthest from it. Condemn not this as a hard saying. It is no more than the merciful Jesus himself plainly declares. His subject in this parable is self-

deception. He begins with an alarming description of those whom it misleads and ruins.

I. Look at *the persons to whom these lamps belonged.*

Marriages, among the Jews, are solemnized in the evening. While their famed city stood, it was customary for the bridegroom, when the ceremony was ended, to lead his bride from her father's house to his own. This was not done privately, but with all the pomp and display which the parties could command. Their female friends were invited to grace the procession. These, adorned in festal dresses and each carrying a lamp, assembled near the dwelling of the bride, and, as soon as the bridegroom led her forth, received them with loud acclamations, and then, forming a train, conducted them, with songs and every demonstration of joy, to their future home. There a feast was provided, from which strangers, and all but these select and invited guests, were carefully excluded.

A ceremony of this kind is now before us. Five virgins are pointed out to us as waiting, with lamps in their hands, for an expected bridegroom. But they are not alone. Five other virgins are gathered together on the same spot, and on the same errand. With these the persons we are speaking of, were associated. They formed

indeed but one company with them. Nor was this circumstance strange. They were, like them, virgins; they wore the same bridal dress; they carried lamps of a similar kind. And not only so; they professed to be expecting the same bridegroom.

You know, brethren, who this bridegroom is. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, that Being of wonderful grace, who styles himself the Husband of his church, and often calls that chosen and beloved church his bride. It is plain then that we must not go among our thoughtless and ungodly neighbours for the persons represented here. These evidently care nothing about the coming Saviour, and can, in no sense of the words, be said to "go forth to meet him." We must look for them among ourselves. The parable tells us that they are the friends and companions of the people of God, mixed with them, and so much like them, that no human eye can at once, if at all, perceive the difference. They are men of blameless lives, and, to all appearance, of heavenly hearts; men who think of Christ, and expect Christ, and have given up worldly sins and worldly follies, that they may be prepared to welcome Christ at his appearing.

Mark the faithfulness of this blessed Teacher. Passing over in silence the great multitude of those who openly despise him, turning away our

eyes from every wavering, suspicious follower of his cross, he bids us fix them on the few who are esteemed the most excellent in his church, and while we are wishing our soul in their soul's stead, he tells us that among the most admired of these, are the men who will one day cry out in the bitterness of their hearts, "Our lamps are gone out."

II. Our next enquiry then must be into the meaning of this cry. It comes from the group of virgins at which we have been looking. Five of them suddenly discover that the lamps which they had brought with them to throw a light and brilliancy around the bridegroom, are just expiring.

We can be at no loss to discover what we are to understand by *their going out*. In the language of scripture, light is often used for hope; prosperity, joy. The extinguishing of a light must mean therefore the destruction of these things, the end of our happiness and honour. Thus Job uses the figure. "How oft," says he, "is the candle of the wicked put out!" And thus Solomon employs it; "The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out." These passages will explain the text. The men it refers to, carry a lamp; that is, they make a visible profession of religion—not of that ordinary kind of religion, which consists in being called after the name of Christ, which brings us

to his house and his table, and then leaves us at liberty to think no more of him. These men profess to love Christ, to desire his coming, to be prepared and waiting for it. And up to a certain point, they are sincere; they imagine themselves ready to meet their God. But their lamps go out. Their profession comes to an end. All the hopes which they had grounded on it, perish. They are in darkness, precisely in the same state in which death and judgment find those who have never heard of a Saviour.

We begin now to perceive that this simple complaint conveys a very serious truth. It tells us that of those who have long appeared to themselves and others the ardent friends of Christ, many will eventually discover themselves to be utter strangers to him. It brings the matter nearer home. It bids us tremble for ourselves. It reminds us that the most zealous and honoured of us all may be Christians in appearance only; that notwithstanding all we have heard, all we have felt, and all we have done, we may be found in the end altogether unprepared for our descending Lord, as empty of all true religion as the darkest heathen.

Do you ask how this strange thing can be? Go to the parable for an answer.

III. Consider, in the third place, the reason

why the lamps of these virgins ceased to burn, *the cause of their going out.*

This must be traced, in the first instance, to their own inconsideration and negligence. They were "foolish" virgins. Satisfied with providing for the present hour, they wanted that wisdom which expects a future hour of need, and lays up in store a supply for it. They "took their lamps," and lighted them. Thus far all was well; but "they took no oil with them," that is, no store of oil. The consequence was, when the cry was made, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," they saw with dismay that their lamps were expiring.

The question is then, what does this oil represent? The power of the Holy Ghost, the grace which he pours into the Christian's heart, and which he himself has taught us to call "the anointing which abideth in us." But what is this? It is something within a man, which makes him feel himself a lost, undone sinner, and causes him to look on Christ as a great and precious Saviour; something that softens his heart when it is hard, and warms it when it is cold, and quiets it when it is troubled. It is something which changes, and sanctifies, and humbles, and guides him, and makes him meet for heaven. This is true religion, its spring, its food, its life, its substance, its all in all.

Of this the men here alluded to, are destitute.

Perhaps they have never really known their need of it. There is no deep sense of sin in them, no feeling of helplessness, no aiming at high and heavenly things, no sustained, persevering effort to draw near to God. All is form, or doctrine, or outward display; cold, dead.

Perhaps they conceive that they have this Spirit. Something has passed within them, which they mistake for it—a work of conscience perhaps, a play of feeling, a soaring of the imagination; in some cases, a melting and burning of the heart. These things satisfy them. They keep up their profession and their hopes for a time; but, in the end, they give way, they wear out. And what have they left? Nothing. And why is this? The fault is their own. They have not the Spirit, because they never sought the Spirit. The Lord said, “Come;” the Spirit himself said, “Come;” ministers and friends urged them to come, to ask at the throne of mercy for saving, lasting grace; but in vain. Not a single earnest prayer did they ever offer up for the precious blessing. They were content to go down to the grave, they were content to up to judgment, with no more religion in their hearts, than corrupt nature had planted there, and their own poor strength maintained.

IV. Let us pass on now to a fourth point—the

hour when the lamps of these careless virgins were extinguished.

1. This was not before midnight came ; consequently *not till they had burnt a considerable time.* And a man may go on long, as well as go far in a religious profession, and yet “ fail of the grace of God.” Build a house on the sand ; it is not every storm that will beat it down. It is not every sunny hour that will scorch the corn which springs up on a rock. Nor is it every sermon, nor every warning, nor every affliction, which can strip the self-deceiver bare. Many never have their eyes opened till death stares them in the face ; nay, there is a confidence, and a false one too, which the near prospect of a fiery judgment cannot shake. These very virgins are alarmed one hour ; but where are they the next ? At the bridegroom’s door. And what are they doing there ? Rending the air with their wailings and self-reproaches ? No. They are demanding admittance. They are saying, “ Lord, Lord, open to us.”

2. These lamps went out *when their light was most needed.* It was midnight, a dark hour. The bridegroom was at hand—the virgins must have a lamp burning, or they cannot meet him.

We always need the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is not an hour nor a moment, in which we can be either happy or safe without it. There

are however seasons in which our need of it is especially great and pressing. And these are the very times when the hopes of the self-deceiver perish. A day of trouble is one of them; the hour of death is another—on this side of the grave, the most appalling of all. At a distance, it is nothing; we think of it with composure; but no tongue can tell how death appears when it is close at hand. None but the dying know what it is to die. A sinking body, a receding world, a dark, lonely grave, loathsome corruption, the frightful worm—these are not trifles; they make us shiver as we think of them in connection with a lost friend or child. But a guilty spirit, an offended God, an unknown, strange eternity—these surprise the soul by the reality which they assume, they overwhelm it by their importance. In such an hour, no slight hopes will support us. If conscience does its work, nothing but the liveliest faith, the firmest hold of the divine promises, can give us one moment's quiet. O what an hour for all our hopes to leave us! O what a time to discover our goodness to be sin, our religion a delusion! Flesh and heart failing, the world useless, and the heaven we had so often deemed our own, out of our sight! And what is near? We know not. Nothing at which we dare to look.

But let this hour be past; let conscience

sleep ; let it be an hour of calmness ;—we must feel our need of the grace of Christ when it is gone. We shall be in a world of spirits : not hearing of eternity, but in it ; not thinking of a judgment-seat, but trembling before it ; not saying, “ Is there a God ? ” but seeing him ; not musing about heaven and hell, but standing on their borders, within a step of their pains or joys, with only a moment between us and an everlasting home. No self-righteous hope can stand in such an hour as this. It may have rooted itself very deeply in the mind ; we may have carried it about with us all our life long ; it may have stood firm against many a sermon and many a providence ; it may have triumphed over the plainest declarations of the Bible, and borne unmoved the shock of death ; but take it into eternity, bring it among the realities of that unseen world ;—where is it ? It is gone. One moment has turned it into immoveable despair.

3. The lamps of these virgins went out at an hour *when they could not be re-kindled* ; at least, not re-kindled in time for their intended purpose. “ Give us of your oil,” said they to their wise companions, “ for our lamps are gone out.” “ Not so,” answered the others, “ lest there be not enough for us and you ; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” They went. The shops were probably near, for oil was the

most common merchandize of the land. "But while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready, went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut."

We all know that in worldly things, time is sometimes of wonderful value. A minute, a moment may be worth all we possess. Property, or health, or life, may depend on the twinkling of an eye. A house is in flames. One man escapes; in an instant, another is at the door; but the roof falls, and he is buried in the ruins. My child is struggling in the water. I rush to save it. My hand is within a span of its body; but it sinks, it is lost.

Now go to spiritual things. The change which time makes there, is unspeakably great. We are now within reach of all that sinners can receive, or that God can give. Grace, mercy, salvation, heaven, all may be obtained by every one of us in the easiest way, on the freest terms—simply in this way, through faith in Christ—on these terms, by only asking for them, by really stretching forth our worthless hand to receive them. But let a few years pass away—not all the prayers and cries that misery wrings from us, can procure one drop of water to cool our tongues.

Place us on our death-beds. If we despise the grace of heaven now, can we find it then? We may desire it; we may make the ears of our friends

tingle by our piercing cries for it : but a death-bed prayer !—it is like the shriek of a man who is overtaken by flames. The Bible gives us the history of four thousand years. How many sinners do we read of there converted and saved in the last few hours of life ? One. And when did he find mercy ? In the most wonderful hour of all that history. It was an hour of prodigies. The sun was darkened, the rocks were rending, the graves of the dead were opened, and then the Lord of glory gave up the ghost, and a dying thief was saved.

Place us in eternity. Never since created being breathed in it, has mercy been found for the first time there. Angels could never find it, nor can ruined man. “ Now,” brethren, “ is the accepted time,” the only accepted time ; “ now is the day,” the only day “ of salvation.” There is hope nowhere but on earth. Here the sinner’s road to heaven begins. There is not another in all the universe of God.

V. And what if these things should befall us ? What if our hopes should fail, and we be found at the last without the grace of God ? This parable foretells *the consequences*.

1. The expiring of their lamps *taught these virgins the value of that which they before thought*

needless. It led them most anxiously to seek it. They ask oil of their companions ; they hasten, in the depth of night, to buy it.

The discovery they made concerns ourselves. We are now, brethren, of many minds concerning spiritual things. A few of us deem them of the utmost possible importance. We consider grace and mercy, a new and holy heart, as the greatest of all conceivable blessings. Others wonder at our choice. They look on vital religion, the religion which lifts up the soul above the world, as a useless thing. In their eyes, it is enthusiasm, it is a being righteous overmuch, it is at best an ideal plaything, the dream of fools.

Others take a different view of the matter. This religion, they think, is desirable ; it may be almost necessary. " But then," they say, " it is so cheerless, so melancholy ; we cannot love it. It robs us of the few pleasures we can find in this careworn world, and while we live, it gives us nothing in return for them."

Sooner or later however, there will be but one opinion amongst us all. And what is that ? We find it here. We shall deem the grace of Christ the one thing needful. We shall look on the world, with all its pleasures and cares, its joys and sorrows, its love and hatred, as of no more importance than a shadow that is departed, than a vision of the night.

Go up to heaven. Ask the redeemed who are singing there, what they most prize. The answer is, "Salvation." Go down to hell, and ask the weeping there what they most need. No other sound comes through the darkness, than "Salvation." Come back again to earth. Ask us within these walls what we most desire. O what a multitude of answers is in a moment heard! Money; pleasure; sin; the applause of a few dying rebels; the affection of a worm. But collect us again when a hundred years are gone; put the same question once more to us;—we too have learned the language of eternity; we ask for salvation. We no longer say in our hearts, "The world now, and God hereafter." This is our cry, "O save our souls! Give us grace. Better to be a converted, pardoned sinner, than an unpardoned angel." And how will this great change be wrought? By death; by our being forced to look on things in the light of eternity; by blessed or woeful experience in another world.

2. Observe one thing more. *These virgins were excluded from the marriage feast.* "While they went to buy" the oil they needed, the bridegroom passed along; he reached his house amidst the lights and songs of his happy friends; and when he had welcomed them to his feast of joy, "the door was shut." "Afterwards came also the other virgins," but the door moves not. No en-

treaties can unloose its bars. "Lord, Lord," say they, "open to us." But no. He disowns them. "He answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." And why are they thus rejected? There was room enough and to spare within those walls. The provisions were abundant. These virgins appeared as well attired and as worthy, as the other guests. No crime is laid to their charge. All their offence is this—they had no oil when the bridegroom came; and for this they must be banished from his house for ever.

Even in worldly affairs, a trifling error may be followed by very serious consequences. A step too many may plunge us down a precipice. A medicine taken by one, which was intended for another, may endanger the healthiest life. But what so fatal as the mistake that concerns our souls? It is the design of Christ, in several of his parables, to shew us the danger of an error here. Look at the house that the winds and floods beat down. Why did it fall, while another, raised at the same time, stood? Only because it was not founded on a rock. Why was the guest driven from the wedding supper of the king? Solely for this reason—because he had not on a wedding garment. And here is a company of invited friends excluded from another feast, because, at a midnight hour, their lamps are gone out. And by whom are they excluded? By the bridegroom

himself. And when? At the very time when his heart is full of kindness, and a multitude around him is made happy by his love.

O brethren, as you dread destruction, dread mistakes. "They are harmless," says an unbelieving world. "They are trifles," say your own foolish hearts. "They are truths," whispers Satan. But all this while, these harmless errors, these trifles, these seeming truths, are filling hell. It is not a solitary spirit that they have ruined. Five out of these ten virgins are in darkness, when they expected to enter into the bridegroom's joy. And what is our Lord's testimony in another place? "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." How many then will he exclude? Hear his answer; "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord; and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me."

We must now end. And what have we learned from the things we have heard? It is but a little while ere this picture will become a reality. The scenes here pourtrayed will soon be acted. We shall see them; we shall bear a part in them. What will that part be? Will our lamps be burning when the Bridegroom comes, or will they be gone out in darkness? Shall we sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, at the marriage

supper of the Lamb, or shall we be banished from "the glory of his power" for ever? We cannot look into futurity. We can however look into our own hearts and lives. O that we may strive to get from them a faithful answer to this simple, but tremendous question, Shall I live for ever in heaven, or in hell? What say appearances now?

Do you carry a lamp? Do you profess to be waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven? Then let not that lamp content you; trust not in that profession. Beware of a superficial, outside religion. It is the character of all the false religions that deceive the world. It is the religion of multitudes in this Christian land. But it is not the religion which can save your souls. Nothing leads to heaven, but the grace that comes down from heaven, the regenerating, transforming, purifying grace of the Holy Ghost. And O how easy is it to imagine ourselves possessed of this, when we are as destitute of it as a corpse of life! Be fearful. Be in earnest. Be honest with yourselves. Search your hearts. Rest not till you can discover there the working of a mighty God; not deep convictions merely, not lively impressions or serious thoughts only, but a change from death unto life, a thorough conversion from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. Look at the door of heaven. It is open, wide as infinite power and love can throw it; but what is the

writing which it bears above it? "A holy world."
"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Are your lamps already gone out? or are they going out? Do any of you suspect that you shall wake up in darkness in another world? The greatest blessing of your life may be that suspicion. You cannot think so perhaps. You view your fears in a different light. They are very humiliating to you, very painful. The thought of being far from God, while all your life long you have imagined yourselves drawing near to him, is almost more than you can bear. But if the case really is so, the discovery must in the end be made; and where would you wish to make it? Here, in a world of mercy; or hereafter, in a world of wrath? What if the bridegroom had sent a messenger to rouse these slumbering virgins before midnight came? What if he had bid them look on their expiring lights and empty vessels, only a few short minutes before his appearing? Harsh as his voice might sound, it would have saved them all their misery and shame. The Lord Jesus Christ has awakened you. The work is his. Without him, no minister, no sermon could effect it. And why has he done it? In compassion to your souls. O praise him for his grace! Say not, with Jacob, "All these things are against me!" but say rather, with

the wife of the fearful Manoah, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have shewed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these.

But you must bestir yourselves, brethren. Your chief dangers are these three ;—delay ; but this will not bear a thought. There is ruin in it. These virgins lost but a moment, and yet, "while they went to buy, the bridegroom came." Here lies another peril—in efforts to trim your extinguished lamps, to revive your hopes by greater earnestness in your former course. You might as well attempt to make the dead move and act. And then comes a third danger—mistaking a discovery of your danger for your remedy, a desire after grace for grace itself. Beware of these things. Lose no time in vain lamentations. Regard your past religion as a cheat. Begin anew. Your grand defect has been a want of inward, enlightening, converting grace. It is still your most pressing want, almost your only one. And O how easily may it be supplied ! "Go ye to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." Apply for the Spirit to him who has "the residue of the Spirit ;" to him who purchased it for sinners with his tears and blood ; to him who has been for six thousand years dispensing it to every one that has asked it of him ; to him who gave it to Noah, and Abraham, and Paul, and who will rejoice to give

it you ;—and on what terms ? Freely, “ without money and without price.” Christ is our light. To Christ then let the prayer go up from every heart, “ Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

Are your lamps still burning ? Have you reason to hope that the religion which you profess, is a religion of the heart ? a religion which has the Holy Spirit for its Author ? Then be assured that it will have heaven for its end, its rest. Whence came the grace that first separated you from a thoughtless world ? Whence comes the grace that renews your spiritual life day by day ? that reminds you of Christ when you forget him, and keeps you waiting and longing for his appearing ? It comes from the heavenly Bridegroom himself. And why does he give it you ? That he may have you for his companions and friends, for his joy and his praise, in the day of his glory.

SERMON XVIII.

THE ROCK AT HOREB.

I CORINTHIANS x. 4.

They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

ROCKS are common in Judæa. Often lofty and sometimes rent into caverns, they serve as places of refuge from storms, shelter from heat, and protection from enemies. Hence the great Saviour of Israel is frequently spoken of in the old testament as their Rock, and all his trembling people are encouraged to fly to him, in all their perils, for safety and repose. But these are not the only, nor yet the chief mercies connected with this term in the text. It relates to Israel in the desert ; and those poor wanderers needed something more in that dreary waste, than a hiding place and a shade. We find them at Rephidim fainting with thirst ; and how are they relieved ? Not by rain

from above, nor by springs from beneath. The Lord their God “brought them forth water out of a rock of flint.”

Now why was this? Saint Paul informs us. He calls this mysterious fountain a spiritual rock, and the water which flowed from it, spiritual water; and he calls them so, because they were designed to have a spiritual meaning, and to represent spiritual things—the one standing as an emblem of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the other shadowing forth those precious blessings of which he is the Author.

You know, brethren, what these blessings are. Though numerous as our wants, these two words, mercy and grace, will comprehend them all. To us they are of unspeakable importance; the very things which we need the most while we are in this world, and the only things which we can take with us when we go into another. Let us then be serious and prayerful, while we endeavour to trace the resemblance which we are told they bear to the waters of Horeb.

And this may be discovered in the source whence these waters sprung, the uses for which they were designed, and the manner in which they flowed. We must however confine our attention, for the present, to their source.

I. The most striking feature in this is *its*

unchangeableness. It was a rock, and one of peculiar solidity and strength. Hitherto time has not been able either to destroy or materially alter it. Travellers inform us that it is still to be seen near the foot of mount Sinai, no longer indeed sending forth its miraculous stream, but still retaining the plainest tokens of having been once a fountain of many waters.

And what can impair or change “the high and lofty One,” from whom cometh salvation? No rock so durable as he, no mountain so stable. The rock of Horeb has remained the same for three thousand years; the hills around us have stood firm against time and storm for perhaps a longer period, and their unchangeableness may well be used to set forth the everlasting existence of the great Redeemer; but before they were brought forth, he was in the bosom of his Father; and after they have perished, he will abide unmoved the Rock of ages; he will live and reign the Lord of eternity; “the same” in his faithfulness, love, and power, “yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

Here then is something for a sinking heart to rest on. All around me is uncertain; shifting, changing, and passing away. My friends are disappearing; the house I dwell in, and this very church in which my fathers worshipped, are hastening to decay; the rivers and hills, the sun,

moon, and stars, will soon be no more. And all within me is as frail. My health and strength are wearing out; my faith often fails me, my hopes droop, and my consolations languish. But he who has the charge of my sinful soul, never changes and can never die. He is the same now, as when he first chose me for himself; the same on his throne in heaven, as on his cross on earth; and when I shall stand before him as my Judge, he will be the same still—"a consuming fire" to them who make light of him, but to the vilest of them that hope in him, unmingled love. O let me therefore "cease from man!" Let me "trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

II. Did the Israelites then, it may be asked, select this rock as a fountain for themselves? No. The source of the stream they drank of, *was chosen by God himself*. Instead of leaving Moses to fix the spot from which it was to issue, he pointed out to him this particular rock, and commanded him, in the use of certain means, to seek for water there. "Behold," says he, "I will stand before thee upon the rock in Horeb." Not that any other part of the plain might not have been made to yield a supply as abundant for his distressed people; but he wished to teach them and us, that the means of salvation are not of man's creating

or appointing ; that he who is the great Author of our blessings, will communicate them only “ as seemeth unto him good.” Thus does he assert his sovereignty, while he manifests his love ; and thus does he humble the sinner’s pride, while he saves his soul.

Hence he tells us in his word, that the eternal Jesus, “ whom he hath set forth to be a propitiation,” is a Saviour of his own appointment ; that he gave him to the world, and sent him into it ; that there is a sufficiency for all our wants in him, because “ it hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell.”

He declares too the manner in which the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, must be sought ; the only terms on which he will bestow it. And no terms can be more gracious. He demands of us no higher a price than the very poorest can pay. And what does he offer us ? More than all the treasures of the earth could buy, or the services of all the angels in heaven could earn. Pardon and righteousness, grace and peace, “ glory, honour, and immortality,” are held out before us ; and this is their price, that we believe the crucified Jesus to be able and willing freely to give them all. “ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ” is the one great command of the gospel ; “ Thou shalt be saved,” its one grand and comprehensive promise. All that is demanded of

sinner, is to be found in the one ; all that a God of infinite love can bestow, is contained in the other. He asks of us no more, partly because we have no more to give, and partly because it would tarnish his honour to accept more at our hands. " By grace are ye saved, through faith ;" and why through faith ? The Holy Spirit tells us— " that it might be by grace ;" that in the ages to come, when we are near our great Redeemer in heaven, we might shew forth there the exceeding riches of his grace.

It follows therefore, that such of you as are thus seeking mercy, relying for it solely on the promises of God in Christ Jesus, can never be disappointed. He who has chosen Christ for a Saviour, will never cast out those who accept him as their Saviour. Resting on him alone, you are building on that corner-stone, " elect and precious," which the Father himself has laid in Zion ; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than your hopes shall fail. You are on the appointed Rock, and though you may sometimes fear and tremble there, you are safe.

It follows too, that such of you as are seeking mercy in any other way, must come short of it. However right that way may seem, it is not the way of God's appointment, and the end thereof must be " the ways of death." You may be very honest, very moral, very useful, and, as you and

others also may conceive, very godly; but in trusting to such things as these for salvation, what are you doing? Nothing less than this—rejecting God’s method of salvation, and substituting another of your own;—pouring contempt on his wisdom, and setting up above it your own vain imaginations;—turning away from the door that he has opened to his kingdom, and striving to force your way into his presence by another. Self-dependence in this matter is not a mere error in judgment, a pardonable mistake. It is disobedience, opposition, rebellion. It is an effort to rob the Father of his glory, to exclude the Son from his office and thrust him from his throne, to be independent of the Holy Ghost. It “frustrates the grace of God;” it makes Christ to be “dead in vain.” It has pride for its origin, all ungodliness for its fruit, and self-destruction for its end.

III. But though the source of these waters in the desert was chosen by God, yet *it was opened, according to the divine appointment, by the hand of man.* It was a smitten rock. The Lord said unto Moses, “Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock,

and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink."

The blessed Jesus too was smitten, "stricken of God and afflicted;" smitten by the divine permission and agreeably to the divine purpose;—smitten in his body; his hands and feet nailed, his head torn with thorns, his side pierced;—smitten too in his soul, and so smitten there, that were all the anguish that has ever wrung the human heart, poured in one moment into any one heart, there would still be no sorrow like unto his sorrow, the depth of the Redeemer's misery would still be unfathomed.

And it behoved him thus to suffer. There was a reason and a necessity for every pang he bore. Out of the overflowing fountain of love in Jehovah's breast, not a single drop of mercy could reach the sinner. It ran in streams of life and joy through the hosts of heaven; it would have gladdened the earth, but a broken law stopped it in its course. A race of beings was living here, who had set at nought the "holy, just, and good" commands of him who made them. An awful sentence had therefore gone forth against them, and before it could be repealed, a ransom must be found, a satisfaction for insulted justice; and he whose law had been trampled on, found it in his own everlasting Son. The holy Jesus was set apart from all eternity for the work of our redemp-

tion. In the fulness of time he entered on it. Taking on him a body prepared for him, he came into our world, and placing himself in the sinner's stead, "he gave his back to the smiters," and "bare in his own body on the tree" the sinner's curse. And man himself gave the blow. With his own wicked hands, he crucified the Lord of life, and thus fulfilled, though he knew it not, the Father's purpose. Hence the apostle, when speaking of the cruelty of the Jews against Christ, declares that they were gathered together to do nothing more than what the hand and counsel of heaven had "determined before to be done." And signs and wonders testified the same. As the symbol of Jehovah's presence abode upon the rock when Moses struck it, so in the trembling earth, and rending rocks, and fearful darkness, he manifested his presence at the crucifixion of his Son. And the Son himself, though forsaken by his Father, saw him there. The divine decree was hid in his inmost soul. It carried him to the cross, and it kept him on it. He looked on his sufferings as the cup which his Father had put into his hands, and shrunk not from them till "he bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

Thus the Rock of our salvation was opened, and the waters of life gushed out. Mercy rejoiced to find its way, for the first time, into an apostate

world, and has ever since run like a river in the dry places of the earth.

Here we must pause. But we have already seen enough in this history to shew us *the sameness of the church in all ages*. It has experienced indeed many changes, changes of dispensations, changes of mercies, and still greater changes of sorrows ; but amidst them all, it has had but “ one Lord, one faith, one hope.” Its blessings have all flowed from one and the same source, the unchangeable Jesus. Adam in paradise was taught to look to him for redemption, Abraham to rejoice in him, Job to hope in him, and even the impious Balaam to admire him. As for Israel, we are expressly told that “ the gospel was preached unto them as well as unto us.” Their sacrifices, their tabernacle, their temple, their worship, their high priest, were shadows of it. And in the wilderness, their very sacraments were of the same kind. “ Moreover, brethren,” says the apostle, “ I would not that ye should be ignorant how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ;” were introduced, as it were by baptism, into the profession of that religion which Moses was to teach them ; were consecrated unto God and owned by him as his church :—“ and did all

eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink"—the manna, like the bread in the Lord's supper, typifying the body of Christ; and the water, his blood and Spirit. Both too had the same design as our sacraments; they were memorials of past mercies, and pledges of future blessings.

We have however no reason to suppose that all the Israelites saw the Messiah in these faint representations of him. Probably few of them discovered him, and fewer still as a suffering Redeemer. Why then was he thus obscurely revealed? Alas, brethren, why is he clearly preached to us? It is the same in Christian England, in the midst of all her boasted privileges, as in the camp of Israel—they are many who hear of Christ, but they are few indeed who really know him. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

But if the Jews learned nothing from their types, they may teach us, and they were designed to teach us, that there is but one fountain of life for dying man. All the ancient streams of grace came from the crucified Jesus; all we now receive is out of his fulness; and the springs of heaven are in him. Those rivers of pleasure which are flowing there, "proceed out of the throne of God and the Lamb." It is still the Lamb, who feeds and gladdens. "In him" therefore, it is

said, "all things, in the fulness of time, will be gathered together in one;" and of him, even now "the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

Hence we may discover here *the great glory of Christ*. The rock of Horeb has now nothing magnificent in its appearance. It is neither high nor large. And yet who could look on it without admiration? The recollection that it once preserved the lives of two millions of human beings, and was afterwards, for nearly forty years, a source to them of health and comfort, must invest it with no common grandeur.

And even if the Lord Jesus Christ were not glorious in himself—strip him of the light he dwells in, silence the praises of heaven, remove far away the ten thousand times ten thousand adoring spirits who worship at his footstool, veil him once again in a body of humiliation—yet this one fact, that all the blessedness which sinners ever knew, has sprung from him, lays the believer at his feet in adoration and wonder. We esteem him rich, who, after supplying his own wants, has still wherewith to relieve the wants of others; we call him great, who has preserved a nation; but here are riches that have made unnumbered millions blessed for ever, and a power that has saved a world. It is this, which causes the church below to glory in nothing save the Redeemer's

cross ; it is this, which the church above takes as the subject of its loudest praise. It was the prospect of this glory, that enabled Christ himself to “ endure the cross and despise the shame ;” it is the enjoyment of this, which now fills and satisfies his soul. And when the Son of man at the last great day shall “ sit on the throne of his glory,” what is it that will make him so glorious there ? The hosts of mighty angels around him ? an assembled world at his feet ? the melting away before his presence of the earth he suffered on, and of the sun which beheld his reproach ? No ; —the salvation of the lost. “ He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.”

Who then does not see here *the duty of praise* ? But duty is too poor a word. Praise is a blessed privilege. A sight of Christ in the glory of his grace, turns it into a feeling, an impulse, an honour, a joy. It is the happiest work in which the Christian is ever engaged. It is the work of heaven. It lifts his soul upwards towards heaven. It makes him long to be there. And it shews him too, that he is going there. He feels himself straitened on earth ; his powers fail him. He wants his heart enlarged, that it may hold more love for his Saviour ; he wishes for a thousand tongues to magnify his name.

And O what will his joy be, when he finds

himself able to praise the Redeemer as he wishes to praise him? when he first hears the adorations of the glorified just, and feels that he can join in their song? That must have been a wonderful shout of joy, which was heard in the camp of Israel, when the water first gushed from the rock; but what must that song be, which bursts from the countless thousands of heaven around the throne of the Lamb? We must be content to wait awhile before we take our part in it. Our love however, in the mean time, must not grow cold. It must not end in lively feelings; it cannot satisfy itself with empty words. If it be that love by which faith works, it will make the life holy, as well as the heart warm. It will strive to glorify him among men, whom it hopes to praise among angels. "The beast of the field shall honour me," says the Lord, "the dragons and the owls, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen." How much more then the people whom he has formed for himself! "They shall," says he, "shew forth my praise." Brethren, is this scripture fulfilled in you? Are you living to the praise of redeeming love? Are you beginning on earth the work of heaven?

SERMON XIX.

THE STREAMS FROM THE ROCK AT HOREB.

PSALM lxxviii. 16.

He brought streams also out of the rock.

THERE were two rocks opened for Israel in the wilderness ; one at Rephidim, soon after their departure from Egypt, and the other, about two years before their entrance into Canaan, at Kadesh. Both these are alluded to in the verse preceding the text. Here one only is mentioned. This is probably the rock which was smitten by Moses at the foot of mount Horeb, and which we have the authority of scripture for viewing as a representation of Christ.

It was not by sacrifices and ceremonies only, that he was preached to the ancient church. Many circumstances were permitted, and many events occurred, purposely to remind them of their

great Deliverer. This was one of them. We see prefigured in the source of these streams the unchangeableness, the divine appointment, and the sufferings of Christ ; and in the water itself, the mercies which his people derive from his blood and Spirit. The uses for which it was designed, plainly represent them. They shew us, brethren, what we need, and what the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted to give. O may he open our eyes to discern their value, and incline our hearts to desire and seek them !

I. The stream of Rephidim *saved the Israelites from perishing*. This was its first and chief use. And it saved them too, when nothing else could save them. The manna could not, though it fell from heaven. In that sultry desert, food alone is not sufficient for the support of life. Its intense heat renders water absolutely necessary, while, in many parts of it, none can be obtained. The condition of these wanderers was therefore desperate ; and no less desperate is ours. As their bodies had wants, so have our souls ; and wants which, whether we feel them or not, must be satisfied. We need pardon, we need salvation. And whence are they to come ? From ourselves ? from our tears and prayers ? All the tears that were ever shed, and all the prayers that were ever offered, could never ransom a single soul, nor atone for a

single transgression, could no more blot out iniquity, than Israel's cries could quench their thirst. And what can the world do for us? It cannot keep even our bodies from the grave; much less our souls from destruction. "But the mercy of the Lord—may we not hope in that and be safe?" As well might this dying people have hoped in mercy for life, while they refused to drink of the stream which mercy had provided for them. In their helpless condition, we may see a faint representation of our own. We are a perishing people; not guilty merely, not in a critical, dangerous state only, but lost, altogether lost, utterly undone.

We see then, brethren, the great end of the Redeemer's sufferings, and the great object he has in view in sending the tidings of them to us. It is to save our "souls alive," to pluck us as "brands out of the burning." And this must be our object also in preaching the gospel, and yours in hearing it preached. It is not a matter of ceremony that we are engaged in, but a business of life and death. It is not knowledge, nor hope, nor comfort, no, nor even holiness itself, that must be our last great end and aim; it is the redemption of our immortal souls, deliverance from the wrath to come.

II. These waters however did more than save.

Enabling them to wash away from themselves the defilements of the sandy wilderness, *they served to cleanse the Israelites*. Herein also they testified of Christ.

Sin pollutes while it destroys. It is uncleanness, and it renders unclean every soul that it enters. It has entered our souls, and made every heart here, like the prophet's chamber of imagery, a dark storehouse of loathsome abominations.

And we are altogether unable to free ourselves from it. Where sin enters, it abides. So dreadful is its nature, that to be its victim for one moment is, if left alone, to be its victim for ever.

This the scripture declares and this facts prove. Six thousand years ago it came into our world. We know not how many human beings have since been born here; but this we know, that sin has corrupted them all, and that among them all, not one has freed himself from its pollution; not one has been found, who could say, "I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin." And if we look away from the worms of the dust to creatures of a higher order, to angels that "excel in strength," the mournful fact is the same. Ages since, sin turned some of the brightest of their host into devils, and it keeps them devils still; as unclean as at first, and as unable to throw off its dominion, as the feeblest of ourselves.

Some of us are at ease in this sad state. Either

we are insensible of its vileness, or, like "the brute beasts that have no understanding," we love the mire that pollutes us. Others however are not at ease. They feel their uncleanness, and they loathe it. It fills them with self-abhorrence. It is their shame, their grief, their burden.

Now, brethren, to such of you as are thus minded, this scripture offers direction and comfort. It calls you off from your wearisome efforts to cleanse yourselves, or rather from your vain confidence in them. It tells you, that though you continue these efforts ever so long, the stains on your souls will grow broader and deeper every day. And then it discovers to you "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" it bids you wash in it; and assures you, that whosoever washes in it, it is able, like the pool at Bethesda, to make him "whole of whatsoever disease he hath." "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you," said the Lord to his church of old, "and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you." "The blood of Jesus Christ," says the apostle, "cleanseth from all sin," from all its defilement, as well as from all its guilt. And this cleansing virtue is ascribed to his blood, because he obtained for his church, at this costly price, the gift of the Holy Ghost, that sanctifying grace which he now sends down into the hearts of his people, and which "work-

eth effectually in them that believe," subduing, purifying, and ennobling, till it makes them meet for heaven. The Spirit indeed sanctifies, but that sinners may know whence this blessing comes and where it must be sought, the Saviour claims the work as his own; and the Spirit himself speaks of it as his, as the fruit of his love and death. "Christ also," says he by his servant Paul, "loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Do you ask then, brethren, how you may escape the bondage of corruption? Look out of yourselves to Christ for deliverance. Labour still after holiness, but let your labour be "in the Lord." By the exercise of a simple faith, make Christ your sanctification, as well as your redemption. Believe him able to heal all the diseases of your souls, and treat him as though he were willing. Implore him to do the work which painful experience has taught you is beyond any power of your own, and the work shall be done; not so completely at first as you may desire, nor perhaps by the means you expect, but in a way which will more effectually exalt your Sanctifier, and benefit you; by means which may perplex, while they

subdue you, but which, in the end, will leave you spotless as the angels, and pure as the spirits of the just; so holy, that he in whose sight the heavens are not clean, shall see no iniquity in you; so faultless, that "the only wise God our Saviour" shall "present you before the presence of his glory," not with satisfaction merely in the work of his hands, but "with exceeding joy."

III. There is yet another use for which this stream was designed.

Long continued thirst in any climate brings on extreme faintness, as well as much suffering. In the eastern deserts, its effects are inconceivably dreadful. The Israelites were now beginning to experience them. Sinking with weariness and pain, "their soul," we are told, "fainted in them." But the same water that preserved their lives, renewed their strength. *It so refreshed them*, that, ceasing from their murmuring cries, they rose up, and, after fighting a whole day with the Amalekites, they overcame them, and then pressed forward with fresh vigour on their way to Canaan.

In like manner, the waters of life, the streams of salvation, refresh the people of God. None but themselves can tell how much they need refreshment. The world which others love so well, is to them a wilderness. They have wants

that it cannot supply, and desires that it cannot gratify. It vexes them too with its sins, and burdens them with its cares, and harasses them with its temptations. And even were it not so, were the world a paradise, the corruptions of their own evil hearts would turn it into a desert. Their weakness, their unbelief, their hardness, their sensuality, their desperate wickedness and their unconquerable pride in the midst of it all, often lay them down mourning and trembling. A sense of guilt also sometimes returns, chilling and darkening their souls, turning their songs into weeping and their joy into heaviness. In such seasons, they well understand the meaning of the psalmist's cry, "Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit faileth, my spirit is overwhelmed within me, my heart within me is desolate. My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is."

But look at the men a second time. They are now all life, vigour, and joy; no longer in the dust, but "running the race that is set before them;" hastening on to heaven through the conflicts of this troublesome world, as though there were nothing to hinder them in their course. And whence has this change proceeded? One word will explain it all—they have been to Christ. They have drunk "of the brook in the way; therefore" do they "lift up their head." Able

to bear no longer the pressure of their burdens, and wearied out with their fruitless endeavours to find rest from them, they have at length cast themselves, in all their wretchedness and guilt, on the grace of the eternal Saviour, and he has refreshed them. Pouring out his life-giving Spirit upon them, he has quickened their faith; led them from the contemplation of their own weakness and perils, to a renewed discovery of his power and love; disclosed to them afresh the richness, and freeness, and faithfulness of his promises; taught them to lean again on his everlasting arm; and now nothing can move them. The strength of Christ is within them. He is to them as "rivers of water in a dry place." "He has put a new song in their mouth, even praise unto their God."

And all this strong consolation is no more than he has promised to all his fainting people; no more, brethren, than the most comfortless of you are encouraged to seek at his throne. Hear his own gracious declaration to his church of old; "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water." "Then shall the

lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

Where, brethren, but in Christ can you find such refreshment as this? Where out of Christ can you find any real consolation at all? You may seek it in the world. Thousands are seeking it in that dry land, but they are chasing the shadows of the desert. Fainting with thirst, the poor traveller in the wilderness sometimes sees, as he imagines, a lake of water at no great distance from him. In vain his more experienced companions tell him that the sparkling sand is mocking him with a deceitful shew; he hurries on, and, though the wide-spreading lake seems to fly before him, he still pursues it. And what is his reward? The sickness of disappointment: the water vanishes at last entirely from his sight. To these imaginary waters Jeremiah is supposed to allude, when he speaks of "waters that fail," or, as it is translated in the margin of our Bibles, "waters that be not sure," that have no reality.

But look at the man again. He has now before him a plain covered with blooming flowers and the greenest verdure. His heart bounds at the prospect. "This," says he, "is real. O that blessed spot! If I can but reach it, my parched tongue will surely find ease and refreshment there."

He does reach it ; he gathers eagerly the verdant grass ; but terrible is his disappointment ; the herbs, so fair to the eye, are dry as ashes and bitter as wormwood.

And such is the world. Amidst all the comforts left in it, it is deceitful, wearisome, bitter. Half the things in it, that lead us from our God, we fail to obtain ; we find them shadows : and O what are some of those we do grasp ? Sweet for a moment to the taste, but the gall of asps within us ; the end of them is death.

In these three uses then, the waters of Rephidim and the mercies of the gospel are alike—they both save, cleanse, and refresh.

And herein they remind us, first, of *the close connection which exists between the mercies of salvation* ; of their mutual relation and dependence. The water refreshed none whom it had not first saved ; and even its power to cleanse contributed, in no small degree, to the comfort of Israel. In spiritual mercies the connection is still closer. An Israelite might have carried about with him a polluted body, after the reviving waters had preserved his life ; but never yet has there been found one sinner saved by the blood of Christ, and yet not cleansed by his Spirit. True, this mighty Deliverer first redeems ; but then he never redeems where he does not sanctify ; nay, he re-

deems for this express purpose, that he may sanctify ; “ He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” The scripture goes farther still, and tells us that he sanctifies in redeeming. It describes the very faith which brings the sinner to him, as a holy principle working within, purifying the heart, overcoming the world, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and love. From this redemption and this sanctification, comfort sooner or later springs. It is the never failing effect of an humble hope of the one, and a heartfelt experience of the other. “ Now the God of hope,” says Saint Paul, “ fill you with all peace and joy in believing.” “ The work of righteousness,” says Isaiah, “ shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”

We see then, brethren, that we cannot have the comforts of the gospel, without first seeking as lost sinners its salvation, without first seeking as polluted sinners its holiness. There is no comfort in heaven or on earth for the unpardoned, no joy for the unclean. “ There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” You wonder perhaps at the little consolation the gospel brings you. Wonder rather, that in a guilty, perishing, and polluted world, you have been too earthly minded to think of pardon, too self-righteous to accept of a free

salvation, too much in love with sin to follow after holiness. Is it strange that the judge does not strew with flowers the path which leads the criminal to execution? Is it strange that the condemned sinner should find the way to destruction cheerless? Would you go rejoicing into a world of eternal mourning? Begin at the right end. Let your first prayer be, not, "Lord, comfort me;" but, "Lord, save me." "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

We see also here, for our encouragement, that if we are in good earnest seeking of a crucified Saviour pardon and grace, refreshment will eventually come—a consolation which may at first be faint and wavering, which may afterwards through our unbelief at times fail us, but which will go on increasing from strength to strength, till it ends in the joys of heaven.

And those whose peace is interrupted, may learn here how it may be restored. When, brethren, did real joy first spring up in your soul? Which was the first truly happy moment you ever knew? Was it not that which found you a weeping suppliant for pardon? Was it not that wherein you first hoped for salvation? Was it not when loathing your old hard heart of stone, you were supplicating of the Holy Spirit a new and feeling heart, a heart of flesh? Herein then your own

experience must be your guide. Harass yourselves no longer with taking useless counsel with your soul. "Do the first works." Lie low among the guilty and unclean before the cross. There peace found you at first; there wait for peace again. Mark the conduct of the mourning David. He asks, in the fifty-first psalm, for the joy he had lost; but it is from salvation he expects it; "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." And what had he asked before? That without which, he well knew, joy could never come—the blotting out of his transgressions, and the cleansing of his sins; "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

These streams remind us also by their uses, of *the misery of the world without Christ*. It is without salvation, without holiness, without consolation; perishing, unclean, comfortless. Such the subject we have been considering represents it; such experience finds it.

And it is not a small portion of the world to which this description applies. Six hundred millions at least of our fellow-creatures, are at the present moment in this grievous state. It was through many generations the portion of their fathers; if let alone, it will be the portion of their children. And all this time, we and our fathers have had the streams of mercy, the still waters of

comfort, flowing at our very doors; and streams so abundant, that they would save a world, and be no more diminished, than as though they had saved only one.

Thanksgiving is our first duty; but what is our second? Surely this, to hold out to the thirsty heathen the same cup of salvation, that has refreshed us. Among the thousands of Israel, was there one suffered to remain in ignorance of the miracle wrought for the camp at Horeb? No; the shout of those who first saw the water burst from the rock, was undoubtedly heard afar; and they who drank of the stream, must surely have been eager to spread the tidings of it to every sufferer. Thus too they who beheld the wonders of Calvary acted. As long as life remained, they went "into all the world, and preached the gospel to every creature." We have not been like minded, neither were our fathers; but Christian love is now waking from its long and shameful sleep. The cries of our fellow-pilgrims in this howling wilderness are heard; they have reached you, and you in some poor measure have already answered them. But millions are yet perishing in misery; their cry is piercing as ever. O let not your pity fail; let not your hearts grow cold. Never drink for a single day of the rock that follows you, without a prayer that its streams may run and be glorified through all the earth.

We have yet another and still more important truth brought before us here—*the necessity of a personal application of the mercies of the gospel to ourselves*. Whom among the thousands of Israel did the stream in the desert save? Those who heard of it? those who saw and admired it? those who merely longed for it? No; “they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them.” Though opened by God himself for their relief, they never thought for a moment of being preserved by its waters, till they had actually received them within their lips.

Need I say, brethren, that in spiritual things the case is the same? that we must make the salvation of Christ our own, before it can save us? Alas, what is there that we need to have more often sounded in our ears, than this simple truth? It is here that so many of us fail. We hear of a glorious salvation wrought out for perishing man by a glorious Saviour; we know something of its nature; we profess to desire it for ourselves, and we actually expect when we die to obtain it. Perhaps we go farther. We teach our children its wondrous plan; we speak of it to our friends; we are ready to help in sending its glad tidings to heathen lands: but all this while, not a single attempt have we made to secure an interest in it for ourselves; we have not so much as once earnestly asked for it. We expect to be preserved

by a remedy we have never taken, to be refreshed by water we have never tasted, to be happy in a salvation we have never sought. Our religion is not a personal thing ; and this one defect in it mars it all. “ Verily, verily, I say unto you,” says Christ, “ except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”

The cause of this fatal mistake is plain. We do not, like Israel, feel the misery of our state ; we are rather in the condition of a man dying with hunger, and loathing the only food that can save him. We have no thirst for the waters of life. Either we know not our need of them, or they are too spiritual and heavenly for our taste. The root of the evil lies in our own earthly and sensual minds, and there the remedy must be applied. And who can apply it ? Who can reach a heart buried in worldly cares, and crowded with worldly desires ? None but he who formed it at first. It is in “ the day of his power,” that his people are willing. It is when he has opened the heart, that the heart welcomes his mercy. To him therefore we must go, not merely for salvation or for the faith that lays hold of salvation, but, so low are we fallen, for a willingness to be saved, for even the very desire of deliverance. Prayer, brethren, is the first step towards heaven ; and this is the first blessing that

prayer must sue for, the quickening grace of the Holy Ghost; that hungering and thirsting after Christ, which he only can satisfy, and he only can give.

SERMON XX.

THE FLOWING OF THE STREAMS FROM HOREB.

PSALM cv. 41.

*He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out;
they ran in the dry places like a river.*

WHEREVER we see mercy, there Christ also may be seen. Indeed, if we loved him as we ought, we should see him every where, in every object we behold, as well as in every comfort we enjoy. Thus was it with Saint Paul. He knew that “of him, and through him, and to him, are all things;” and in all he saw, or heard of, or experienced, he discovered his beloved Lord. He found him with Israel in the desert. He shews him to us at Rephidim. In the rock which supplied the thirsty multitude with water, we have an emblem of his unchangeableness, divine appointment, and sufferings; and in the water itself, a representation of his saving, cleansing, and refreshing grace.

There is yet one point more in which the comparison holds, and one which gives fresh interest and value to all the rest. It is brought before us in the text. The psalmist describes the manner in which the waters flowed from the opened rock, and, in doing so, reminds us of the gracious terms on which the rich blessings of salvation are bestowed.

I. "He opened the rock." It is clear then that the waters of which the Israelites drank, were not of their own discovering, or procuring, or deserving, but the unmerited gifts of divine mercy. They flowed from the rock *freely*; and the thirsty people drank of them without cost or labour.

Now, brethren, we are all ready to admit a part of the comparison which occurs to us here. We are all aware that man had no more to do with providing a Saviour for the world, than he had in creating the world. But the most important, because the most practical part of this resemblance, many of us, nay, all of us are slow of heart to perceive. We cannot be persuaded that he who has freely provided salvation for us, will allow us freely to take it. Our self-righteousness, the dreadful pride of our heart, stands in our way; so that we disdain to accept even the glories of heaven, without having done something to procure them. Look at the great mass of professing

Christians ;—what is their religion ? The suing of condemned criminals for pardon ? The imploring of starving beggars for bread ? Far from it. It is the toiling of a hireling for wages ; the attempt of a worm to climb by its own efforts to the skies. Thousands who talk of mercy, are resting as entirely on their own supposed goodness for a happy eternity, as the proud pharisee of old, or the still prouder infidel now.

And even when the Spirit of Christ begins to humble the heart, the heart opens itself slowly and reluctantly to the reception of this truth. The sinner feels now that he really needs mercy ; but then he still clings to the idea, that he must do something to make himself a proper object of mercy. He despairs of deserving heaven, but he yet hopes to deserve that grace which leads to heaven. “ I know,” he says, “ that I am a sinner ; I feel that I am a lost sinner. If I am ever saved, it must be grace that saves me. But can such a wretch as I, with such a heart as mine, dare to hope for salvation ? No. This hard heart must be more thoroughly broken, my guilt must be more deeply bewailed, my sins must be in some degree abandoned and subdued ; then will I venture to draw near to the great Saviour, and implore the cleansing of his blood.”

But the scripture speaks a different language. It represents the gospel as designed for the ex-

press purpose of shewing “the exceeding riches” of Jehovah’s grace; and so planned and ordered, that all whom it saves, are saved to “the glory of his grace.” In other words, it is intended, not merely to save the transgressor, but so to save him, that all may see in his salvation the wonderful grace of God. It follows therefore that any merit of any kind on our part, would entirely frustrate the design of the gospel. It would turn its mercy into justice, and its grace into debt. It would, in fact, place us out of its reach.

Accordingly we find that whenever the gospel offers us mercy, it offers it as mercy, pure mercy; as a gift for which no price is demanded, and which looks for nothing in its receiver but want and misery. This is its gracious proclamation, and the prophet seems to labour in it for words to express the freeness of its terms; “Ho, every one that thirsteth; come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” And as though this were not enough, as though his servant had not even yet sufficiently declared the freeness of his love, the ascended Jesus takes up his language; “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.” And in another place he

adds yet to the force of this invitation, and then leaves it in his word as his last call of mercy to perishing man ; “ I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.” “ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

One thing then is clear, that the blessings of the gospel are as free to sinners, as the stream in the wilderness was to Israel. Desert is no more required in the one case, than in the other. The only qualification demanded is a sense of need, thirst, desire, a willing mind.

II. But now comes the question—To whom are these rich mercies thus freely offered ? Let us turn to the desert for an answer. The water flowed *openly* there. No barrier was raised around it. It “ ran in the dry places,” the places where it was most needed, “ like a river,” open to all who chose to drink of it, and at all times.

And of just the same boundless extent is the salvation of Christ. When the fountain of his grace was opened, it was left open ; and for whom ? Not for a select company of favoured individuals only, nor for a few of the least guilty of our race, but for a perishing world. All alike need it ; and wherever the tidings of it come, all alike, without

regard to country, or age, or character, are invited to take of it. None are excluded, none are preferred. The vilest of ourselves is as welcome at the cross, as the best ; as welcome as a Paul, or a Peter, or a John ; yea, as welcome to all “ the unsearchable riches of Christ,” as the spirits of the just to the blessedness of heaven. “ If any man thirst,” cried the Saviour aloud among a multitude eager to shed his blood, “ let him come unto me and drink.” And after this desperate people had actually crucified the Lord of glory, we hear Peter declaring, declaring in the hearing of the very murderers of his Lord, declaring expressly to them, “ Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” And the testimony of scripture is every where the same. Its invitations, its promises, its commands, its entreaties, its very threatenings, all proclaim aloud that the salvation of the gospel is as open as it is free, that there is not a contrite sinner on the earth excluded from its blessings.

It is cruel then to limit its offers of mercy, because they are sometimes abused ; and it is still more cruel to explain them away, because they encumber some favourite system. We are standing among dying men, and while we are indulging our fears or contending for our systems, they are perishing. Our duty is plain. It is to leave God to control “ the foolishness that perverteth his

way," and fearlessly to publish his salvation. It is to point to the Saviour lifted up on the cross, and say, "Whosoever believeth in him shall be saved."

I am not setting up this truth in opposition to any other of "the faithful and true sayings of God." There is indeed none more precious, none to which a guilty sinner would more desire to cling; but "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and the man who "trembleth at his word," will receive all with the same simple belief. I am not to reject or forget any part of my Bible, because my feeble understanding cannot discover its agreement with some other part. I am not called on to reconcile its declarations, but to believe them. Once admitted into my heart, they will reconcile themselves. And nothing but the experience of faith can reconcile them. Their power must be felt, before their harmony can be known.

Here then we have a sure and broad foundation for a sinner to rest on—the waters of life flow openly and freely; they are to be had without money or price by all who desire them. Brethren, do you desire them? Are you, at least, conscious of your urgent need of them? Is sin your burden, your grief, your dread? Are you willing to accept deliverance from it? Then say no more with the sorrowing women who were seeking their

Lord, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" the stone is already gone; the fountain of mercy is already unlocked; the way to it is as open and plain, as infinite love can make it. As for fitness, in the willing mind which the Spirit has given you, you have all that God requires, all you ever can have, all that the redeemed in glory ever possessed. Think again of the fainting Jews. Did they refuse the water from the rock, because they had just before been murmuring against him who gave it? Did they plead their guilt, or their extreme suffering, or their dying state, as a reason why they should hesitate to drink of the stream? Did they talk of waiting till their thirst and misery were partially gone? No; they joyfully "drank of the rock that followed them," and they were welcome to its waters. Imitate their conduct. The stream of mercy is flowing down from the lofty heavens to your feet. Drink of it, that you perish not. In the midst of all that is grieving and discouraging you, cast yourselves just as you are on the free grace of the Lord. "Be not afraid, only believe," is the language of Christ; now, at length, let the answer of each one of you be, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

III. If this encouragement be not enough, the text suggests to us more. It describes the waters as flowing *abundantly* in the wilderness; "He

opened the rock, and the waters gushed out," as though eager to be gone where they were so much needed: "they ran in the dry places," not in a scanty rivulet, but "like a river." And in the seventy-eighth psalm, their abundance is yet more strikingly portrayed. They are no longer spoken of as a solitary river, but as "rivers," as "overflowing streams," and, at length, as seas; "He gave them drink as out of the great depths."

And the very same language is employed to set forth the love of Christ in its abundance. "The glorious Lord," says Isaiah, "will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams." But broad rivers are not always deep; another prophet therefore completes the description. Ezekiel beheld in vision the same stream of mercy as "waters to swim in," as a river so deep that it could not be passed over. "The apostles of our Lord bear the like testimony. Peter speaks of his "abundant mercy;" Paul of his "exceeding abundant grace." And what a high expression is that which he uses in his epistle to the Colossians! "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." He is not only gracious, but there is in him the "fulness" of grace; "all" its fulness; he is its great, its only storehouse, so that there is no grace to be found in the universe out of him. And in him it "dwells," rests and

abides. And for what purpose? that out of his fulness all we might receive; that he might make many rich, who are now poor indeed.

All this, it may be, when referring generally to the grace that is in Christ, we readily believe. The difficulty begins when some particular operation of his love is singled out, and more especially when that happens to be the very mercy that we most need. Then unbelief begins to question and limit; praise is changed into silence, and admiration into doubt.

"My sins," says one, "are too numerous, too aggravated, too enormous, for pardon." The Bible however speaks of a blood that "cleanseth from all sin;" of sins which were once as scarlet, now "white as snow;" of a pardon so extensive and full, that it casts all our sins into the very "depths of the sea." It admits that sin abounds; it takes the matter up just as we represent it; but it testifies, at the same time, of a grace that "much more abounds." And then, for a confirmation of its testimony, it shews us a Manasseh pardoned, a David saved, an executed criminal entering with Christ into paradise.

"My sins might be pardoned," says another, "for what cannot infinite grace forgive? but this filthy heart never can be cleansed. Sin reigns in my inmost soul. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" And then comes the

despairing conclusion of idolatrous Israel of old ; “ There is no hope, no ; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.” But what is the answer of Israel’s God ? “ From all your filthiness will I cleanse you.” “ Sin shall not have dominion over you.” “ My grace is sufficient.” He bids us listen to the prayer of one of the guiltiest of our race, a prayer which was answered, a prayer which he has preserved in his word that we may take it as our own ; “ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” He tells us of a Saul “ breathing out threatenings and slaughter ” against his disciples one hour, and the next a trembling suppliant at his feet ; of one too vile to live, enabled in the agonies of death to discover in an expiring malefactor the King of heaven, displaying a humility and a faith which magnify the sanctifying power of God, even more than the salvation he found exalts his mercy.

“ Pardon and grace,” says a third sinner, “ I may find, but comfort is not for me ; my misery is too deep, my heart too completely broken. Let others talk of peace ; I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul. My only consolation lies in this, that the time is short ; and this is my only earthly hope, that the days of darkness between me and the grave may be but few.” This is often the saddest case of all, but this the gospel

meets. "The Lord hath anointed me," says Christ, "to comfort all that mourn; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted." And how does he fulfil his office? Patiently, tenderly, effectually. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted." Look at Peter. Was there not a time when his tears were as bitter as yours, and his grief as pungent, and his heart as despairing? And yet this man speaks afterwards, like one who was experiencing it, of a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Look at Paul—"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;" the most afflicted man on the face of the earth, and yet the happiest.

Brethren, there is but one sorrow, but one sin, but one evil, for which there is not in Christ a remedy; and that is despair, obdurate unbelief of his word. Need what we may, desire what we may, he is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think;" and if we enquire what he is willing to do, this is the measure of his bounty, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

IV. Nor is this a transient supply. The stream from Horeb ran in the wilderness *constantly*. Neither a burning sun nor a thirsty soil could dry it up, nor time nor distance lessen it. During

eight and thirty years, it followed Israel in all their wanderings. At Kadesh indeed it failed—why, we know not—but the miracle was again renewed, and the people still “drank of the rock that followed them,” till they entered Canaan.

Thus constant in its communication is the grace of Christ. It is as lasting, as it is abundant. It took its rise in the eternal ages that are gone; it entered the world as soon as sin had made a way for it; it has ever since been flowing on like a mighty river, widening and deepening as it goes, and it will flow on as long as there is a mourner to be comforted, or a sinner to be cleansed. No drought can exhaust, nor cold arrest it. “Living waters,” saith the Lord, “shall go out from Jerusalem, half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.” And in eternity the stream of grace shall not be lost; it will be seen in heaven a pure river of life, making “glad the city of God,” a sea of salvation, an ocean of blessedness.

But we may bring this truth more closely home to ourselves. The grace of Christ follows the church in all ages; but this is not all;—it follows every member of that church, every Israelite indeed, through all his earthly pilgrimage. And herein it reminds us of these four truths.

1. *We always need this grace.* All of us always

need it; not merely the careless sinner and the fearful penitent; the holiest and the happiest here need it as much as the most guilty and comfortless. In this respect, brethren, there was no difference between the apostle Paul and the poor idolaters he preached to; in this respect, there is no difference between the best of you, and the vilest heathen on the earth. Grace does not render the soul independent; it does not make it less needy in itself. It supplies its wants, but it prevents not those wants from returning again. The food of yesterday does not satisfy the hunger of to-day. The rain which refreshed your fields and pastures in the last spring, is not sufficient for their supply in this. Your bodies do not more need daily bread, than your souls need daily grace.

And it will ever be so. It matters not how long you may have tasted that the Lord is gracious, nor how near to heaven his mercy may have brought you; let mercy and grace cease to follow you, the consequence is certain—you are lost.

And who that loves the Saviour, would wish it to be otherwise? There is nothing degrading or painful in this dependence; there is something in it inexpressibly sweet. It endears Christ to the sinner, and the sinner to Christ. It makes the sinner so cleave to his Lord, that his whole life becomes a life of faith on the Son of God; it makes Christ more watchful over the penitent sin-

ner, than the mother over the babe that depends on her for support.

2. Hence we may infer, secondly, that *we may always have the grace we need*. Its very continuance on the earth is a proof that, while on the earth, we can never seek it in vain.

There is a strange propensity in some young Christians to lose sight of this truth. They are exceedingly anxious about their future spiritual supplies. Grace for the present hour is all they can obtain: they know this; and yet they are restless, as though they would take at once supplies for eternity. This anxiety often proceeds from a fear lest eventually their sins should exhaust the divine patience, and shut up the fountain of mercy against them.

Now, brethren, in what state of mind were the Israelites, when the waters first gushed out from the rock? They were murmuring against their God. And what were they afterwards? Murmurers still. "They sinned yet more," says the psalmist, "by provoking the Most High in the wilderness." Yet the rock was not closed; their sins never dried up its streams.

Turn now to yourselves. When you first drank of the water of life, you were in a still worse condition than these Israelites. True, they were murmurers; but they joyfully accepted at once the relief provided for them in their misery. You,

on the contrary, added yet this to your other sins—you long made scorn of the very blood that was shed to save you. And what have you been since? What are you now? Yet even now grace and mercy are brought home to your very hearts. At this present moment the blessings of the gospel are all spread out before you. At this present moment the invitation is sounding in your ears, “Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” Why then these harassing apprehensions for the future? Have you forgotten the past? Have you forgotten that the Rock of your salvation is unchangeable? that the Lord Jesus Christ is the same now, as in the days that are gone, and will be the same for ever? You may be sinful, but he will not cease to be gracious. He will never save you in your sins, but he will always save you when flying to him for deliverance from them. For thus saith “the Lord that created the heavens, God himself that formed the earth, I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.” “When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.” And if these declarations do not meet your fears, he speaks to you yet again; “I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts,

that they shall not depart from me." "Who-soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." What then will you say in answer to these gracious promises? "I shall one day perish?" No. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

3. If we always need the grace of Christ and may always obtain it, it follows, thirdly, that *we ought always to seek it*. Were the parched Israelites content with drinking once or at stated seasons of the spring of Horeb? No; they came to it as often as thirst returned; it was their daily refreshment on the burning sands, and their hourly comfort. And what other comfort or refuge have we, than Christ the Lord? Where else can we go for the strength we need to carry us to heaven? Nay, how can we bear the trials of this desolate wilderness without him?

Do we ask how often we should be found at his feet? But one answer can be given to the strange enquiry;—as often, brethren, as we have a sin to be pardoned, a defilement to be cleansed, a fear to be removed, a care to be lightened, a want to be supplied; as often as we breathe. Nothing less than this the apostle commands;

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” To this he himself in some measure had attained; “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” And nothing short of this, if we are Israelites indeed, is our end and aim: we are never satisfied except when drawing near to Christ; we never deem ourselves safe except when hungering and thirsting after him; we are never completely wretched except when seeking happiness at a distance from him.

Abide then in Christ. Beware of forsaking this “fountain of living waters.” Beware of the broken cisterns, the false streams of comfort, of which the world is so full. They are worse than disappointing; there is a curse in them. Jeshurun tried them. He forsook the “God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” And then the anger of the Lord was moved. He said, “I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end shall be. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat and with bitter destruction.” And why all this awful displeasure?

4. Because, in the last place, *there is guilt, as well as folly, in despising the grace of Christ.*

Picture to yourselves a traveller parched with thirst, and ready to faint with anguish on a burning sand. In the extremity of his distress, a stream of water bursts from a rock before his eyes, and follows his painful footsteps mile after mile. He is entreated to drink of it; but no; the man is playing with the pebbles at his feet, or digging for water in the thirsty ground. But what is his folly, when compared with that of the sinner who hears of the salvation of Christ, and yet is too much taken up with the vanities of sense to accept it?

We must not however talk of his folly; it is his guilt, which should most affect us. Not to make use of the grace which flows from a smitten Saviour, is to despise the richest love, to pour contempt on the deepest wisdom, that an infinite God ever manifested or ever could manifest to the sons of men. It is a guilt, which forced the apostle to exclaim, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" We cannot escape; we must perish. And who can tell us what it is to perish with the curse of despised mercy on our heads? None but the lost. "To be thirsty in a desert," says a recent traveller, "without water, exposed to a burning sun, without shelter, and no hopes of finding either, is the most terrible situation that a man can be placed in." No, brethren, there is a situation still more

terrible than this. What is a scorching desert to a burning hell? The merciful Jesus himself speaks of it as a world, the fire of which never can be quenched, and where not a drop of water can ever cool one tormented tongue.

And this fearful world is not, like an eastern desert, removed with its suffering far away from us; it is very near us; so near, that a few more careless steps may plunge us into its horrors. And how will this reflection aggravate them all, that they have been our own choice! that salvation was provided for us, but we scorned it! that overflowing mercy was offered, but we despised it! that there is bread enough and to spare in our Father's house, while we are eating the bread of bitterness with the devil and his angels!

Shall we continue easy with such a prospect before us? Let us rather say, "Woe unto them that are at ease!" Let us rather change our quiet into fear, our unconcern into trembling. Let a prayer for deliverance come from every heart, and this cry from all our lips, "Lord, save; we perish."

SERMON XXI.

THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD.

PSALM cxiii. 5, 6.

Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?

WE never think seriously of God without feeling, with the psalmist, that there “is none like unto him.” Among all the wonders we ever saw or heard of, he is the greatest.

But what is it that makes God so wonderful a Being? You think perhaps of the extent of his power, the eternity of his existence, or the mysterious nature of his person; but there is something in the Lord almighty still more wonderful than all these. It is, brethren, the greatness of his love, his amazing condescension. This drew from the fervent David the burst of admiration,

which we find in this text. In a transport of wonder and praise, he challenges the universe to shew any thing comparable to his great and condescending God.

I. We may consider, first, the view which he gives us of *the majesty of God*.

But how can I convey or you receive any idea of this? We cannot describe it. The fault is not in language; it is in the weakness of our minds. We are finite beings, and any effort to comprehend infinite greatness is vain; just as vain as an attempt to measure the wide heavens with a span, or to take up the ocean in the hollow of one little hand.

Why then does the Holy Spirit bring before us a subject, of which we can form no just conception? Because even the poor conceptions of it, which we are capable of forming, are beneficial to us; because we must perish without some knowledge of God; because we may know enough of him to bring peace and life eternal to the soul.

No description of his greatness can be more simple than that given us here, but it would carry an angel farther than he could follow it. "The Lord our God dwelleth on high."

The grandest objects of nature are mostly above us. The towering mountain, the sun, the

moon, the stars, all carry our eyes upwards. We have accordingly learned to attach the ideas of magnificence and excellency to whatever is lofty. Hence, in condescension to our mode of thinking, the great God is frequently spoken of as "the high God," "the Most High," "the Highest." Isaiah describes him as "sitting upon a throne high and lifted up," and calls him "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity."

In the verse preceding the text, the inspired psalmist tells us something of the measure of his exaltation. "The Lord," says he, "is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens." He first bids us look on this lower world; and while we are admiring its convenience, its vastness, and its grandeur, he says, "The Lord dwells not there; the Lord is high above all nations." He then lifts up our eyes to the worlds that roll in light; and as we see them shining in their magnificence at an immeasurable distance from us, we are ready to say that in some one of these bright orbs is the dwelling place of God. But no. Again the prophet says, "The Lord is not there. His glory is above the heavens." Stupendous as is their height, they come not nigh the footstool of Jehovah's throne. Were we standing on the summit of them all, the distance between him and us would still be immeasurable; our minds

must still be stretched, and our imaginations strained, to discover his abode.

View the matter in another light. Look at a little insect as it flutters in the air, or crawls on the ground. Think of its short life, and frail texture, and limited powers. Then think of one of the angels of God, of the noble faculties and long existence of the very brightest of those glorious beings. Endeavour to calculate the distance, the vast difference between these two creatures. You feel at once that you cannot; that the distance is so great, that the mind is baffled as it strives to measure it. But what is the difference between an insect and an angel, when compared with the distance between an angel and the living God? It is a mere point, a nothing.

Take yet another view of the subject. We all know how easy it is to say whatever can be said in commendation one of another. A few poor words will exhaust the praise of the most excellent of the earth. It is not so in heaven. The songs that are resounding there, come from innumerable hosts of angels, and from "a great multitude" of the redeemed among men. They have been poured forth without a moment's interruption for many ages; they will go on without ceasing for ever. The subject of them all is one and the same, the praise of the King of kings.

Now imagine for a moment what such songs, in such a place, from such worshippers, must be ! how fervent, how elevated, how divine ! We are ready to think them worthy of their subject, suited to the glory of the great Lord of all. No, brethren ; his glorious name, we are told, “is exalted,” raised on high, “above all blessing and praise.” The songs of heaven cannot set forth his majesty. Though lengthened out to eternity, they can never adequately display even one of his perfections.

We are brought then to this conclusion, “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised,” but “his greatness is unsearchable.” All the discoveries which have yet been made of it, are as nothing when compared with what is still concealed ; they are rather “the hidings” of his glory, than the unveiling of its splendour. The psalmist’s description falls far short of the truth. God dwelleth so high, that we cannot ascend to him, we “cannot find him out.”

II. But it is not in his greatness only, that the Lord is thus unrivalled. We are called on to consider, secondly, *his condescension*.

And here we have before us the link which connects the great Creator with his creatures. We cannot rise to him ; he therefore stoops down to us. And he does this without impairing his

own dignity. His condescension does not lessen the vast difference between us and our God. It leaves him on his lofty throne, and us in the dust before him. And yet it brings him near to every one of us ; places us as much within his sight, as though he were our equal or our friend.

We need not go far for proofs of the divine condescension : we ourselves are living monuments of it. We owe to it our very being, all we have and all we are. And what is the work which now employs us, but an affecting evidence of its greatness ? He who is exalted above the praise of angels, is suffering a miserable worm to sully his glory by feeble efforts to display it, is looking with delight on some of you who are endeavouring to comprehend it, is bearing with others who do not deem it worthy of a single thought. Let us admire his patience, while we look at the psalmist's description of his condescension.

1. "He humbleth himself," says he, "to behold the things that are *in heaven*." By "the things that are in heaven," we are to understand the inhabitants of heaven, the glorified saints and angels, with all that belongs to or surrounds them. And "beholding" them signifies, not merely observing them as their Lawgiver and Judge, but taking an interest in them and their concerns. Exalted as he is, the Lord is not so

wrapt up in his majesty, in his own glory and happiness, as to overlook them. No; he makes them the objects of his care, his love, and his delight. And in this he manifests his condescension. "He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven."

But how is this? Is not heaven a holy place, and are not the spirits also, who dwell in it, holy? They are; but then they are creatures, and, as creatures, they fall infinitely short of the perfection of the living God. In comparison with ours, their knowledge is excellent; but it is as nothing when compared with his infinite wisdom. Hence he is said to "charge his angels with folly." And pure as is their dwelling place in comparison with the earth, he says that it is not "clean in his sight." Look at man, and all in heaven is knowledge and holiness; look at God, and all is mingled with ignorance, pollution, and meanness.

Dwell on this thought, brethren. Think what a world heaven is—how unspeakably glorious! Read the glowing, the elevating descriptions given us of it in the word of God. And after you have thought and read, hear the inspired writers tell you, that it has not entered, and cannot enter into your heart to conceive aright of this wondrous place. Then, while your minds are filled with the subject, and the glories of the new Jerusalem seem to be almost present to your

view, turn to this text, and read here—what? that this is a place worthy of the God who formed it? suited to be the habitation of his greatness? No; that he humbles himself if he deigns to cast an eye on it.

2. But the condescension of God comes down yet lower; “He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in *the earth*,” even this vile earth; the very things which we ourselves cannot look on without many a mournful and many a sickening thought.

And here again by the word “behold,” we must understand something more than a mere glance. It implies a concern, an interference in our affairs; a constant and deep interest in all that passes around us and within us; a care so extensive that it reaches to the meanest of our race, and so close that it numbers the hairs of our heads.

Look at the divine condescension as it is seen in *the preservation* of the inhabitants of the earth.

Think of the goodness that upholds us. We have experienced this so constantly and so long, that many of us regard it only as a matter of course; as a mercy of so ordinary a kind, that it need not excite either our surprise or our thankfulness. But did we know the power which is required merely to keep in existence such frames as ours, frames so “fearfully and wonderfully

made," we should all be filled with astonishment to find ourselves still alive.

Think also of the goodness that provides for us. When we consider that every moment since we were born, the providence of God has been at work for our support and welfare; that he has ordered all our affairs, from the highest down to the very lowest; that not a thought, not a movement of our hearts has escaped his notice;—when we recollect how he has come to our aid in the hour of need, and guided us in the hour of difficulty; how he has comforted us in our affliction, and laid us low when in danger of being lifted up in our prosperity; how he has brought darkness out of light for us, and good out of evil, and peace out of bitterness;—when we remember all the way wherein the Lord our God has thus led us, we must stand amazed at his infinite condescension. We must break out, with the wondering psalmist, and say, "Lord, what is man, that thou art" so "mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou" so "visitest him?"

And to place this goodness in a yet stronger light, consider for a moment what we are whom the Lord thus beholds. We are not dwelling in heaven, but here in a fallen world, and we, like the world, are mean and fallen. We are formed from the dust, and after a few years of weakness, vanity, and suffering, we turn to dust again, are

buried in darkness, and forgotten. And not only this, we are polluted as well as mean; the prey of vile affections and debasing lusts; so full of evil, that we can hardly bear with ourselves or with one another. As for God, the greater part of us forget him; some of us blaspheme him to his face, and pour equal contempt on his mercy and on his wrath. And what is the service which the best of us render him? So defiled, that were an angel to offer him such service, he would be sent quick into hell. Yet we are the very beings whom the Lord upholds and provides for; this is the very earth in which he even dwells.

But even this condescension falls short of the humility which he has manifested in *the redemption of his church*.

Think of the means by which this redemption was purchased. That the great and eternal God, the very God who "dwelleth on high," should descend so low as to become man; that, emptying himself of his majesty, he should take upon him our meanness; that he, to whom all honour, and glory, and happiness belong, should submit himself to contempt, reproach, and misery; that the holy One of Israel, into whose presence iniquity never came, should dwell among transgressors, be vexed with their pollutions, and numbered with them; that the Author and Giver of life should himself suffer death, be seen hanging in

a sinner's likeness on a cross, bleeding, groaning, and dying there ; and after all his work was accomplished, that, instead of casting off the form in which he had suffered, he should raise it out of the grave, take it with him into heaven, and sit down in it on his everlasting throne;—this is condescension indeed, the utmost depth of abasement, the infinite humility of an infinite God.

Remember too the condescension displayed in the application of this dearly purchased redemption. Behold the great King of heaven stooping from his height, and deigning to offer terms of peace to a rebel in arms against him. Hear him persuading and beseeching him to accept these terms ; reasoning with the sinful worms of the earth with as much earnestness as though his own blessedness were bound up in their salvation. See him bearing to be despised and rejected ; following the worthless object of his care into every scene of vanity, and striving with him there ; alarming his conscience, rousing his fears, warring with his lusts, exciting his desires ; never leaving nor forsaking him till he has laid him a suppliant penitent at his feet, and then rejoicing over him as though he had recovered a long lost son. Brethren, is not this amazing condescension ? Is it not enough to force every tongue to exclaim, “ Who is like unto the Lord our God ? ”

Consider also the end at which all this wonderful goodness aims. And what is this? The following verses of the psalm will tell us. "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." These words appear to be taken out of the song of Hannah, in the second chapter of the first book of Samuel. In their primary application, they relate probably to the elevation of such men as Saul and David from the lowest ranks of life to the throne of Israel. But the connection in which they stand, requires us to look for a higher meaning in them. They shew us men like ourselves raised from the lowest depths of sin and misery, not to an earthly throne, but to all the honour and blessedness of heaven. "He beholdeth the things that are in the earth;" and this is the great end he has in view in all the preserving and redeeming mercy he has shewn them, to take the poorest he can find among them out of the dust of death, and set them among his own kings and priests in a world of life; to lift up the needy, the contrite, and broken-hearted, out of this wretched earth, this dunghill of vileness, and to cause them to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God; to make them the sharers of his own glory and partakers in his own joy.

III. And here we must stop. We can no more fathom the depth of the divine condescension, than we can measure the height of the divine greatness. Indeed, without a full knowledge of the one, our views of the other must be partial. It is the infinite grandeur of God, that magnifies his condescension. It does more than adorn and augment it; it makes it infinite. In both cases our finite understandings fail us. Like men standing on the shore of a wide ocean, we can see a vastness that surprises and fills the mind; but there is beyond our sight a boundless, immeasurable expanse, which no eye can reach. Instead therefore of aiming at a knowledge of God which is "too excellent for us," let us rather seek to make a practical use of that which we are permitted to attain. Admiration is not all which the contemplation of the divine condescension requires. It is condescension towards ourselves; we are the very beings who are most nearly concerned in it. Let us then consider, in the third place, *the influence which it ought to have upon our minds.*

We are repeatedly called on in this psalm to praise our condescending God; but how is this praise to be shewn?

1. In *godly fear*. It may appear strange to some of you, that fear should be the first effect expected to spring from a consideration of mercy;

but turn to the scripture. "The children of Israel," says Hosea, "shall fear the Lord and his goodness." "They shall fear and tremble," says God by his prophet Jeremiah, "for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." And then comes David "out of the depths," singing of mercy and plenteous redemption, and at the same time declaring before his God, "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

The mere professor of religion cannot understand this; it is one of those mysteries which must ever perplex him; but the Christian understands it. His experience has made it plain. Ask him when his reverence of God is the deepest, and his awe the most profound; he tells us, not when he is confining his thoughts to his majesty only, but when he is enabled to regard him in Christ Jesus as his own condescending, gracious, and pardoning God. The fact is, the greatness of the Lord is seen the most in his goodness. He never unveils so much of his glory, as when shewing mercy to the sinful, raising up the poor, and redeeming the lost. None but a God of infinite greatness could display such infinite grace.

2. With this godly fear, *self-abasement* will be connected. It is impossible to look on God in the glory of his condescension, without being

thrilled with a sense of our vileness. And the higher we rise in our apprehensions of the divine goodness, the lower we must inevitably fall in our own esteem. Would you, brethren, continue to think yourselves wise, and righteous, and great? Then turn away your eyes from "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," and keep them fixed on worms of the dust. Would you see yourselves as you really are? Acquaint yourselves with God. Would you, with Isaiah, feel yourselves unclean? Then strive, with Isaiah, to see "the King, the Lord of hosts." Would you, with Job, abhor yourselves? Then, with Job, be not content with "the hearing of the ear," but behold with the eye of faith a holy God. Would you, with angels, prostrate yourselves before the throne? Then, with angels, look into those things wherein "he who sitteth on the throne," has caused his glory to shine.

3. And from this self-abasement flows a *holy sorrow*. Is the God whose laws I am so often breaking, thus wonderful in his condescension? How base then has been my conduct towards him! I have sinned against infinite goodness; I have offended against infinite love. And how little have I thought of this love and goodness! How transient have been my views, and how low my conceptions of it! I have admired the works of my God; I have looked with delight on some of his

creatures ; and yet to his own unspeakable glories I am often blind. “ Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.”

4. *Trust* is another effect produced by a sight of the divine condescension. Why do we find it so hard to repose in God? Because we have low thoughts of him. We measure him by ourselves ; at least, we judge of his goodness by our own ideas of what is becoming his character. The consequence is, when fear comes, we yield to it. But look at this text. It describes the goodness of God to be as great as his majesty ; as much exceeding all our conceptions of it, as the glory that fills heaven and earth, passes our understanding. It is not such mercy as we expect, or desire, or need ; it is such mercy as corresponds with the grandeur of Jehovah, such mercy as even towers above his grandeur, and becomes the chief glory of his wonderful name.

Great faith then ought to be exercised towards such a God. It is a lessening of his honour to allow either sins, or troubles, or wants, to sink us into despair. He can stoop lower than we can fall. He can raise the meanest and poorest higher than the most heavenly minded can conceive. He can succour where human kindness would abandon, comfort where the tenderest earthly friend would forsake, pardon where the most merciful of

his creatures would condemn. Our firmest confidence, our most enlarged expectations, can never equal his love.

We might still go on. The attribute we have been contemplating calls on us to love, to imitate, to glorify our God. But there is an enquiry connected with this subject, too momentous to admit of being passed over. Who among ourselves are warranted to rejoice in the divine condescension? Who are the happy men for whose sake the great God of heaven "humbleth himself to behold the things that are on the earth?" And how can we answer this question? In no other way than by looking into our hearts and lives; in no other way than by enquiring whether we bear on us those marks, by which the Lord has distinguished the objects of his regard. And these are no high or splendid attainments; nothing that it requires either learning, or rank, or even a worldly religion, to attain. Thus saith the Lord, "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest? To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

Is this character yours, brethren? Are you made so sensible of your spiritual poverty, as to be convinced that in you "dwelleth no good thing?"

Is your heart broken, contrite, tender? Does the word of God pierce your very soul, causing you to fear even when it fails to encourage you to hope? Then you are the very men whom he that "dwelleth on high," beholds. "His eyes run to and fro throughout the earth" in search of such as you. He has already found you out. Amidst the infinite variety of his works, you are as much noticed by him, as though you were the only creatures that his hands have formed. Nay, he enters into your smitten and fearful soul; he dwells and rests there; and he loves his mean abode. As he chose it for his habitation, he said of it, as he said of Zion of old, "This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." O what an elevating thought is this! If there is in the wide universe a single being great and happy, it is the man who can look up to heaven and say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." "I am the temple of the living God."

But this blessedness forces the mind to think of the misery of those who are not thus regarded by God. There are multitudes in this wretched condition. And where shall we find them? We need not descend into hell, nor go the dark places of the earth, in the search. There are many such in this parish, within these walls. All amongst you are of this number, who are well satisfied with yourselves; all who are strangers to spiritual sor-

row ; all who have sat sabbath after sabbath, year after year, unmoved by the gospel of Christ. This text, brethren, speaks no comfort to you. It is like the symbol of Jehovah's presence at the Red Sea—to his people, a pillar of light to brighten every thing around ; to his enemies a cloud and darkness to trouble and disquiet. It tells you indeed that the Lord beholds you, for “ his eyes behold and his eyelids try ” all “ the children of men ; ” but he looks on you without delight, with indignation and wrath.

And can you be easy in such a situation ? easy without one glance of love from a Being who is always beholding you, and that Being the Author of all happiness ? Do not even wish to be easy. Yield rather to the disquieting convictions which are now rising in your soul. Call upon the Spirit of God to make them the means of beating down your vain self-confidence ; implore him to humble, abase, and empty you. And then act as though you felt yourselves to be poor and needy. Go to the great Saviour of sinners, that your need may be supplied. You know by the testimony of others “ the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” O may you know it by your own blessed experience, and be enriched and “ filled by him with all the fullness of God ! ”

SERMON XXII.

THE DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TOWARDS THE HEATHEN.

EZEKIEL xxxvii. 4.

*Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones,
and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word
of the Lord.*

THE scene displayed in this chapter is a very extraordinary one. A valley full of bones is presented to our view ; and while we are looking on them, these bones are suddenly clothed with flesh, are seen moving and starting up into life.

It is natural for us to ask, what could be the meaning and intent of a vision so strange as this? and in the eleventh verse, the question is answered. It was designed to represent the state of the Jewish captives in Babylon, and to predict their speedy deliverance from it. But who can contemplate this scene, and not think of ruined Israel now?

of her present dispersion, abasement, and wretchedness?—and not of Israel only, but of the whole heathen world? Here, brethren, is a just, though still a faint picture of every land, of every family, and, to bring the matter nearer home, of every heart, in which the gospel is not known and its power felt.

Let us then direct our attention to these three points;—the state of man without the word of the Lord; the conduct required of us towards him in this state; the promised success of this conduct. And may the Spirit of the Lord, whose hand was upon his prophet of old—that gracious Spirit who has come up with us this day to this house of God, and is as actually present within these walls as any one of ourselves—O may he manifest his presence, and cause us to know that he is among us of a truth, impressing, softening, enlarging every heart!

I. Consider, first, *the state of man without the word of the Lord*; in other words, without the gospel, without that knowledge of invisible and eternal things, which the Bible gives.

1. This is represented here as a very *mournful* state; a state so sad, so lost, that weakness, pain, sickness, will not describe it. It is a state of death; “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and

set me down in the valley which was full of bones."

Now the sight of only a few human bones exposed on the earth is painful to us; we wish them covered; but we have here a wide valley filled with the remains of our fellow-men. And as in imagination you look around on these dreary heaps, think of the sufferings that must have been endured, of the pains and tortures which these frames must have undergone, before they were thus stretched out in unconscious quiet here. In the ninth verse, they are spoken of as the bones of "the slain." It was the hand of violence that strewed them.

And then pass from this dreary scene to one still more desolate. It is not a valley, it is a world of death, in which we are standing; and that not a death which kills the body only, but a death which destroys and ruins the precious soul.

And the world is full of this death. To say nothing of your friends, or your neighbours, or any one of yourselves; to say nothing of the multitudes that are lying "dead in trespasses and sins" in Christian countries; there are no fewer than six hundred millions of your immortal brethren utterly without the life-giving word of God, *strangers to all the consolations and hopes that spring from a knowledge of Jesus Christ.*

When you are in sorrow, you have a remedy

at hand—you can open your Bibles, and read there of a land where sorrow never comes, where the weary head and the troubled heart aches no more. You can think of the love and power of an ever present Helper, when wearied and burdened, and find rest to your souls. When conscience smites, you can fly to the Redeemer whose blood “cleanseth from all sin,” and make his great salvation your hope and joy. But what can the heathen do? Cannot they feel and suffer? Cannot their hearts sink as low, and ache as bitterly, as yours? And yet the gospel which comforts you, speaks no peace to them. It has never lightened a single burden, never dried a single tear, never taken out one sting from a guilty conscience, never cheered one dying bed. O brethren, my friends and companions in a path of tribulation, how can we enjoy the quieting, the sweet, the heavenly consolations of Christ, and not wish to make them known through a suffering world? How can we at times be so happy in God, and yet be content to leave millions of our fellow-pilgrims groaning in unpitied wretchedness?

But the heathen are not only dead to the consolations and hopes of the gospel, *their ignorance of Christ brings upon them much positive misery.*

We sometimes think of idolatry as though it were nothing more than a mere bending of the knee to some image of wood or stone. Were this

all, it would be a degradation which none perhaps can fully understand, save those who have witnessed it. But this is not all. With idolatry, suffering is always connected; it is occasioned, nay, in many instances, required by it. What said the scripture nearly three thousand years ago? "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." The testimony is as true now as it was then. The fact is, idolatry is a dishonour done to the great Lord of all, and he vindicates the insulted honour of his name, by making it a curse wherever it is known.

Turn to India, to Africa, to whatever heathen nation we may, there we find cruel and bloody rites causing the land to groan. Parents exposed in their old age by their own children, left a prey for the beasts of the earth or the victims of famine—mothers sacrificing the infants which they love as well as English mothers love their babes, and casting them into rivers as offerings to their deities—women going voluntarily into flames, or forced into them by relatives and friends—man here torturing himself in the strangest manner, and here raising the shout of applauding triumph at the self-destruction of his fellow-man; nay, becoming the destroyer of his fellow-man, not from revenge, not for what the world calls glory, but for the monstrous purpose of appeasing his gods, and expiating his deeds of blood;—all these

proclaim aloud that to worship idols is to make this wretched world still more wretched, to pour fresh bitterness into the cup of human woe.

And what is the effect of this sin on a world to come? We dare not answer the awful question. At the very best, regarding as true the language of unbelief, eternity stretches itself out before the heathen a dark and fearful waste, a world on which the thoughtful idolater must tremble to set his foot.

2. But we must not stop here. The consideration which adds so much to the mournfulness of this condition, is *its utter helplessness*. This is plainly intimated to us in the vision. A dislocated bone may be set again, a broken bone may have its parts united, but these bones are "very dry;" are in such a state, that unless a power greater than their own is brought into exercise in their behalf, here they must remain, in this desolate valley, till they moulder into dust.

And no more power, brethren, have your fellow-sinners to convert their own hearts, than these bones possess to form themselves into living and happy men. We sometimes hear it said, "Let the heathen alone; they will in time grow wiser; they will be civilized, and then, when barbarism departs, idolatry, with all its horrors and abominations, will be swept away." But what says matter of fact? It laughs such reasoners to

scorn. For nearly four thousand years, “darkness has covered the earth, and gross darkness the people;” and yet in all this long period of time, not a single country can be mentioned, which has emerged, by its own energies, from idolatry and vice. A few nations have civilized themselves, have taken gigantic steps in knowledge and science, but they have been heathens still; they have not once come in sight of the chief good of man; they have been as ignorant as the brute beasts that have no understanding, of the way in which a guilty sinner may draw near to an offended God.

Look at Egypt; look at Greece and Rome in the height of their intellectual greatness. We see them as far from God as the savage African is now; worshipping “gods many and lords many,” and such lords and such gods! monsters of rapine, murder, and lust. Look too at modern India, the most refined perhaps of all the Pagan nations in the present day. What find we there? A superstition as dark, as bloody, as abominable, as ever fettered the mind of the wildest barbarian.

It is the same among the heathen as among ourselves—men do not turn of their own accord from Satan unto God. Leave sinners alone, and they must perish; nay, when not left alone; when warned, and invited, and encouraged; when afflictions check, and God calls, and minis-

ters preach, and friends weep ; all is too often in vain. The truth is this—we may moralize ourselves and others ; we may, in some instances convince the understanding of a sinner, affect his feelings, and alarm his conscience ; but we cannot change his heart ; we have no power over the affections of the man, except it be the power which the unclean spirits possess, of polluting and debasing them. Call into this assembly the most powerful preacher that ever named the name of Christ ; place in this church the eloquent Apollos or the fervent Paul ; nay, bring down from heaven the loftiest archangel that is shining there in his greatness ; he is no more able to give spiritual life to one of our souls, than he is to raise the dead from their graves around us. Let sin once touch, once enter the heart of a creature, and none but an omnipotent God can drive it thence. It matters not where that heart be found—in Christian England or in heathen India, in the temple of Juggernaut or in this church—he only who made it at first, can create it anew. Such is the testimony of scripture ; such is the testimony of experience ; and such, if we are really living unto God, is the testimony of our own consciences. Each of us is constrained to say, “ Lord, it is I. Without thee I can do nothing. Lord, help me. Cleanse thou the thoughts of my heart within me, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”

II. If this be the state of man, it becomes a question how, under such circumstances, we ought to act towards him. Must we leave our perishing brethren alone in their misery and helplessness? Must we think of them awhile, ask with a tear or a sigh, "Can these dry bones live?" and then turn away in slothful despair? This vision will instruct us better. It calls on us to mark, secondly, *the conduct required of us toward the heathen.*

I. The first duty we owe them is *an attentive consideration of their state*, an anxiety to make ourselves acquainted with their actual condition.

Turn to the second verse of this chapter. The Lord did not merely set Ezekiel down "in the midst of the valley which was full of bones;" he caused him to "pass by them round about," to examine them, to notice how "very many" they were, and how "very dry." And this is exactly what the same Lord is now demanding at your hands. He asked it not of your fathers. They heard little or nothing of the heathen; in their days they perished by millions "without any regarding it;" but he has not suffered you to remain in the same unfeeling ignorance. He brings the means of information within your reach, and we beseech you to use them—not to content yourselves with hearing once in the year a sermon or an address on the miseries of heathen

lands, but to think seriously on the subject, to examine it, to take a lively and habitual interest in it, to treat it as though it were a matter of importance, of life and death. Were a neighbour to enter your habitations, and to tell you of a multitude that he had discovered starving among your mountains, how should you act? You would question him closely as to their condition and number; you would think of them after he was gone; if you yourselves did not hasten to look into their wants, you would speak of them to others; you would ask day by day what aid they had received, and what help they needed. And is not the bread of life as necessary for the soul, as food for the body? Is it not as precious? Am I to deem six hundred millions of the starving unworthy of a thought, because they speak not my language, or oceans separate them from my home?

2. But mere examination is not enough; enquiry will not raise the dead. We are called on *to make known to the heathen the word of life*, the gospel.

The prophet is first told to pass round about the bones in this gloomy valley, to fasten his attention on them; and it might have been supposed, this was all he could do; but a new and strange idea is brought before him, and as strange a duty laid upon him. The Lord said unto him,

“Can these bones live?” “O Lord God,” said the wondering prophet, “thou knowest.” And then the command is given him, “Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.”

And this is nothing more than we are all called on to do in this world of death, each of us according to the ability he possesses, and the opportunities afforded him. Not that we are all to become missionaries abroad or ministers at home; one duty is not to set aside every other, one work is not to employ every servant; but there is not a man with a Bible in his chamber, who is not bound to think of the many habitations which that book has never gladdened; and more than this—he is bound to give to these children of wretchedness all the time, and all the effort, and all the property, he can honestly spare, in order to send them relief in their misery.

You need not move far from your own homes, brethren, in order to preach the gospel to the ignorant, or declare its glad tidings to the suffering. There are those within your own parish, perhaps within your own house, who are heathens in heart, though Christians in name. Speak to them of the things that concern their peace; of the things which the cares of the world, the turmoil of life, keep so far from their thoughts—of their souls and their sins, of a glorious heaven

and a dreadful hell, of a descending Judge and a waiting Saviour. Is there no brother who needs a warning? no relative who is perishing in ignorance? no child whose soul is starving? Is there no afflicted neighbour to whom you can say, "Cast thy burden on the Lord?" Have you no friend to whom you have never yet once said, "O taste and see that the Lord is gracious?"

And as for the heathen, there are men actually gone forth among them; men who have cheerfully left their friends and their homes—all as dear to them as our homes and our friends are to us—and are gone to the dark places of the earth to enlighten and cheer them; to say, not to a company of Christians assembled in a quiet church, ready to esteem and love them, but to savages, to companies even of cannibals, "Behold your God." Now missionary societies are established to send out these men, to direct their exertions, to protect them, and, if need be, to supply their necessities. They ask for your aid; and by giving it to them, you fulfil, in some poor measure, the last command of your Lord; you yourselves "preach the gospel to every creature," in the only way perhaps in which you can preach it.

3. But suppose missionaries to be multiplied a thousand fold, suppose them to be sent to every corner of the globe, can missionaries turn

sinner "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God?" Can missionaries raise the dead? No. Attention may be excited to their words; there may be a noise among the bones; they may assume the appearance of living men; but whose work is all this? Even this is the work of the mighty God. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you; and ye shall live." The promise is partially fulfilled. The bones move, they arrange themselves, they unite, they are covered with flesh; but still there is "no breath in them." And what must be done? Ezekiel has prophesied and the Lord has wrought, but before the work can be completed, Ezekiel must pray. "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

Hence we are taught a third duty which the heathen claim at our hands, or rather which the great God demands of us in their behalf—*earnest prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the heathen world.*

In this lies the real strength of every effort

that is made in this holy cause, here must rest all our hopes for perishing millions—in fervent prayer; in a thorough conviction that while we are doing all we can to save the lost, we can do nothing, we shall do all in vain, unless the Lord God of heaven accompanies his servants, and gives power to his word. This is that one thing without which all will be fruitless—a looking out of ourselves; a looking beyond our societies, and missionaries, and exertions; placing them in the dust, and lifting up our eyes to the living God on his throne.

Perhaps the friends of the heathen are not yet sufficiently brought to a sense of this truth. The many disappointments which they experience, may be designed to teach it them. The Lord deals with them as he deals with us in our private concerns—he humbles before he blesses. Consult your own experience, brethren. When have you obtained the blessing your soul has longed for? Never, unless in judgment, till you have been driven for it from poor feeble man to God. Heart-sick with disappointment, you have at length turned from the creature to the Creator, from the broken cistern to the overflowing fountain, and then the desire of your hearts has been given you.

The Lord Jehovah will vindicate his sovereignty; he will have the glory of his own work, and his

jealousy is as great in the public affairs of his church, as in the private history of his saints. He will so bring to pass his purposes of grace, he will so give life to the dead and comfort to the wretched, that, as he himself declares in the sixth verse of this chapter, and asserts again and again in the end of this vision, his people “shall know that he is the Lord.” Hence our best concerted plans are baffled, and our fairest expectations crossed. Hence our missionaries, one after another, are laid aside in the midst of their work, and others die. O could the sainted Brainerd, that gentle but heroic preacher in the wilderness, could the fervent Martyn, speak to us from their early graves, or rather from their thrones in heaven, what would they say? Would they ask us for our silver and gold? Would they urge us at once to imitate them in the almost consuming ardour of their zeal? Would not their language rather be, “Cease ye from man? For the heathen we lived; for the heathen too we died. God shewed you in our lives how ye ought to labour; and then he taught you in our deaths, that his glory he will give to none other. He cut off our days, he deprived us of the residue of our years, to teach you wisdom; to turn away your hopes from all the instruments his condescension deigns to use, to himself who only worketh all in all. Cease ye from man.”

You see then, brethren, how the poorest among you may contribute your aid in this cause. Silver and gold you may have none ; but if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you have that to give which the heathen need more, that which is a far more rare and precious gift—the pleadings of an humble, fervent heart. These can, in a moment, reach the heavens, and, in a moment, send home the word of truth to some lost Indian's or Negro's soul. From your cottage the prayer may be heard one minute, “ Lord, send out thy light and thy truth ;” the next, angels may rejoice to see it answered. The Holy Spirit may look with delight on you, and then breathe into some perishing idolater the breath of life.

Here then we have, in a few words, the conduct required of us—enquiry, exertion, prayer. We must think of the heathen, send them the gospel, and then pray for its success.

And mark with what a mixture of modesty, submission, and faith, the prophet adopts this conduct. He offers no objections to the strange commands given him, enters into no reasonings, asks no questions ; he simply executes the Lord's will.

This is indeed the only way to have the work of God prosper in our hands, or his grace flourish in our hearts. Does he give us any plain command ? Our duty is clear—we are to obey it ; not to reason, but to act ; and, while acting, not

to despair or even fear, not to be calculating probabilities or measuring difficulties, but to pray and hope, leaving the success of our efforts to him whose we are and whom we serve ; to him who can, in the twinkling of an eye, beat down the loftiest mountain that stops our path, or hinder and confound us by an obstacle which we may despise, but cannot pass.

There is nothing more difficult than this simple obedience and simple faith. The union of them is the perfection of the Christian character. It marks the old, experienced warrior of the cross ; it is the badge of " the good soldier of Jesus Christ." It is that which God only can give, and which only he will bless. Let your labours in his cause begin as they may, this will make them end well. However they may be thwarted in their progress, this simplicity of obedience ensures their success.

III. Consider, in the third place, *the promised success of the conduct here enjoined.*

And this, you will observe, was, in this instance, *unexpected, progressive, and complete.* To the eye of sense, it was impossible. A mighty effect is produced, and that by means which appear utterly inadequate, if not absurd. A feeble man stands in the midst of a valley of dry bones ; he speaks to them ; he calls upon the four winds of heaven

to breathe life into them ; and what follows ? He is no longer surrounded with the memorials of havoc and of death ; all have disappeared ; he stands among “ an exceeding great army ” of living men.

Here we get an answer to those who tell us, that the conversion of the heathen world is beyond our strength, that we only shew our folly and our pride in attempting it. Judging as they judge, with a total forgetfulness of the power and promises of God, we must admit the force of these objections ; we join with them in saying, it is useless, it is enthusiastic, it is the very height of fanaticism, to attempt the conversion of six hundred millions of idolaters by the preaching of a few simple men ; we might as well employ as many worms to level the hills of the earth. But we dare not judge as these men judge ; we dare not forget God. What would have been the state of this very land, had the missionaries who preached the gospel to our savage forefathers, reasoned thus ? We might at this hour, on this spot, have been offering up our sons and our daughters to devils. And what would have been the state of the whole world, had the fishermen of Galilee and the tentmaker of Tarsus reasoned thus ? No man will reason thus, who heartily believes the Bible. He will learn in that sacred book, what a shining sun and the rolling stars

might long ago have taught us all, that nothing is "too hard for the Lord." His faith will lift him up above the reasonings, and fears, and objections of a selfish world and his own selfish heart. Instead of looking at difficulties, he will look at the uplifted arm of Jehovah, and in his strength beat them down.

It is by accomplishing great ends by feeble means, that the Lord often causes himself to be acknowledged in a world which disowns him. The "worm Jacob threshes the mountains, and beats them small, and makes the hills as chaff;" and then "the men of Israel rejoice in the Lord, and glory in the Holy One."

And what will be the effect of the wonderful restoration predicted in this vision? As soon as "the exceeding great army" of living men stood before the prophet, the Lord said unto him, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts." And what says the answer of God unto them? He does not describe their state as less hopeless than their fears had represented it; he meets them on their own ground; he addresses them as dead. Thus saith the Lord God, "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord,

when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live; and I will place you in your own land. Then shall ye know," says he again, "that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it."

The conversion of the heathen too is as certain, and will be as glorious. We have the stedfast promise of our God, nay, promise upon promise, to ensure it. It is begun. The word of the Lord has been heard among the bones; and, "behold, a shaking," and more than a shaking; there is breath and life, where once all was death. The first part of the exceeding great army is already risen up; the shout of a King is among them: and heaven will in the end resound with the triumphs of the host. The first fruits are gathered in, and angels and men will eventually rejoice in the abundance of the ripened harvest. We could tell you of whole islands become the followers of the Redeemer, that a few years ago had scarcely heard of his blessed name. The gospel which is preached sabbath after sabbath at the foot of your mountains, is heard with gladness on many a foreign shore. At this very moment perhaps some heathen heart is touched by the Spirit of God; some once senseless idolater is shedding tears of love as he hears of a dying Jesus, is tasting of his grace, and is satisfied.

What then will you say to these things? What can you say, but that the Lord is among his servants of a truth? that he has blessed them in their endeavours to make known his great salvation, and they shall be blessed? that the work which engages them, shall have your aid, your hearts, and your prayers?

What more shall I say to you? Shall I urge you again to think of the mournful and helpless state of your fellow-sinners in pagan lands? There is a matter of far greater importance to you and to me, than this; of more tremendous importance to us, than all the souls of all the heathen. We ourselves have souls; souls which are by nature in the very state portrayed in this vision—a state as bad as any state in a world of mercy can be. They are dead, “dead in trespasses and sins.” Cut off from the Fountain of happiness, their proper, their best life is gone; their purity, their dignity are gone; every thing is gone, which can render their immortality a blessing.

What will it avail me then to have given my time and my money for the conversion of pagans, if my own immortal soul remain unconverted, neglected, and ruined? What will it profit me to have felt for others, if I have had no pity on myself? Look within your own bosoms, brethren.

Ask yourselves honestly and closely, whether this scripture has ever been fulfilled in your own hearts. Have you been convinced that the sad picture here exhibited of captive Israel, is only a description of the natural state of your own soul? that all there is disease, corruption, death? Have you felt your need of the Spirit of Christ? Have you sought his grace? Have you experienced his life-giving, quickening, converting power?

O brethren, let me beseech you to begin at home; to adopt the same conduct towards yourselves, that has been urged on you towards the heathen—to enquire into your state; to apply the word of God to your own hearts, or rather to look upwards and entreat the Holy Spirit to apply it. Once begin to care about your own souls, and then you will begin in good earnest to feel for the souls of others. It is personal religion, an experience of its power, a knowledge of its value, a taste for its sweetness;—it is a sense of redeeming mercy, a sight of Christ as the great Saviour of the lost, “the love of God shed abroad in the heart;”—these are the things which make a man really hearty in the cause of the heathen.

With this impression on my mind, I cannot prevail on myself to use any entreaties with you to contribute liberally your aid. If you value the word of salvation yourselves, you will endeavour to send it to others; and if not, there is some-

thing so sacred, so holy, in this cause, that the money which does not come freely and cheerfully, seems almost to profane it. To urge a company of pilgrims in a wilderness, wounded by its thorns and burdened by its labours—men who have felt the ills of life, and found a remedy for them all in Christ ; to urge them to spare a mite to diffuse the knowledge of this remedy to thousands of the broken-hearted, fainting amidst desolation and despair—to urge a company of sinners who have heard of a dying Saviour and been snatched as “ brands from the burning ” by his grace, to give a little money to make known the glad tidings of his salvation to six hundred millions of their fellow-sinners—I cannot do this, brethren. I would only remind you of One who, unsolicited and unthought of, came here from a very far distant country in mercy to you. And what did he give for you ? Silver and gold ? O no. “ Ye were not redeemed ” with such “ corruptible things ” as these. He gave his own “ precious blood.” And not this only. Though returned to his home and covered with his glory, he thinks of you now. O think of him. Hear him this moment saying to you from the lofty heavens, as his compassionate eye looks over the heathen world, “ Love them as I have loved you.”

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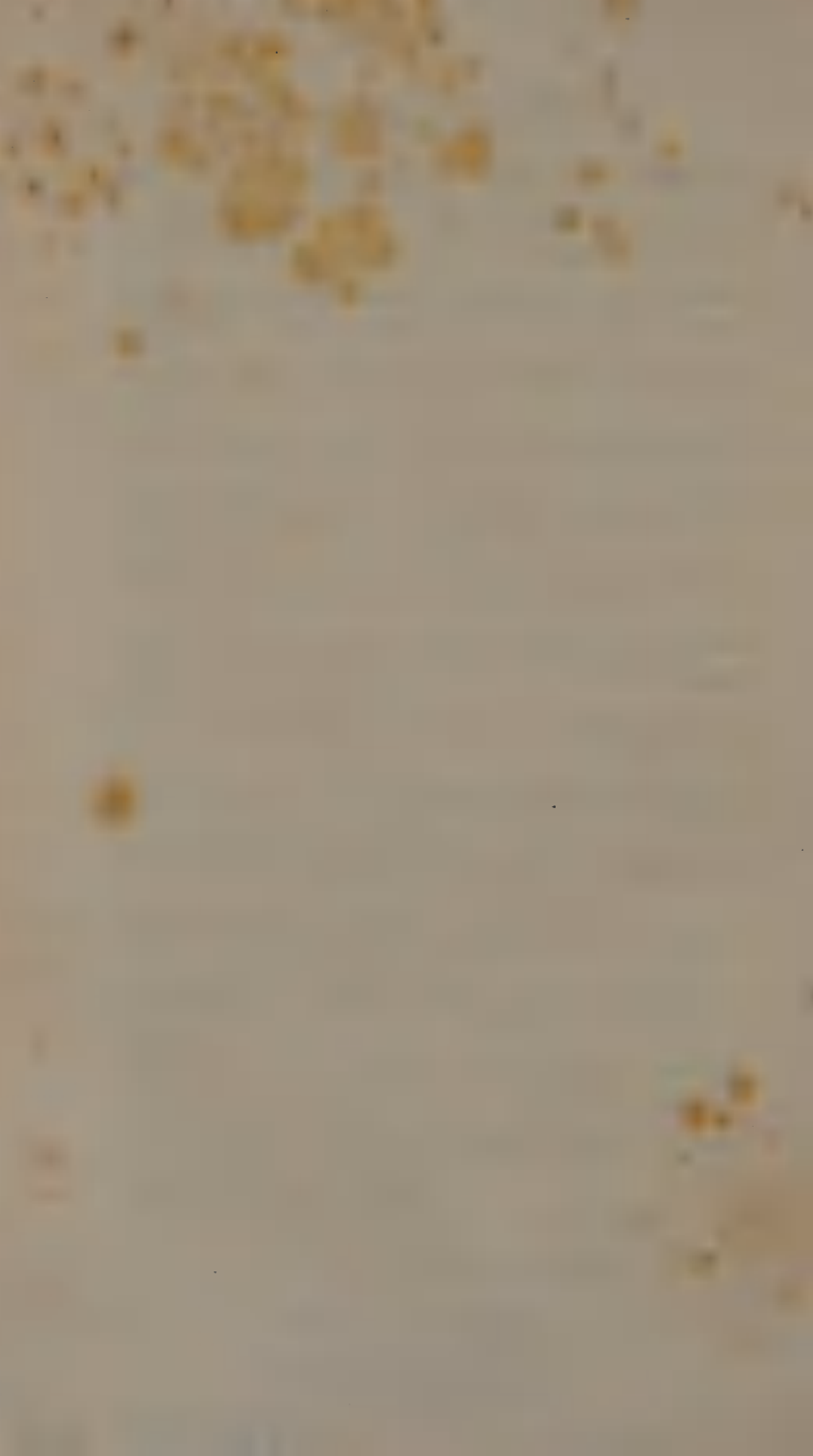
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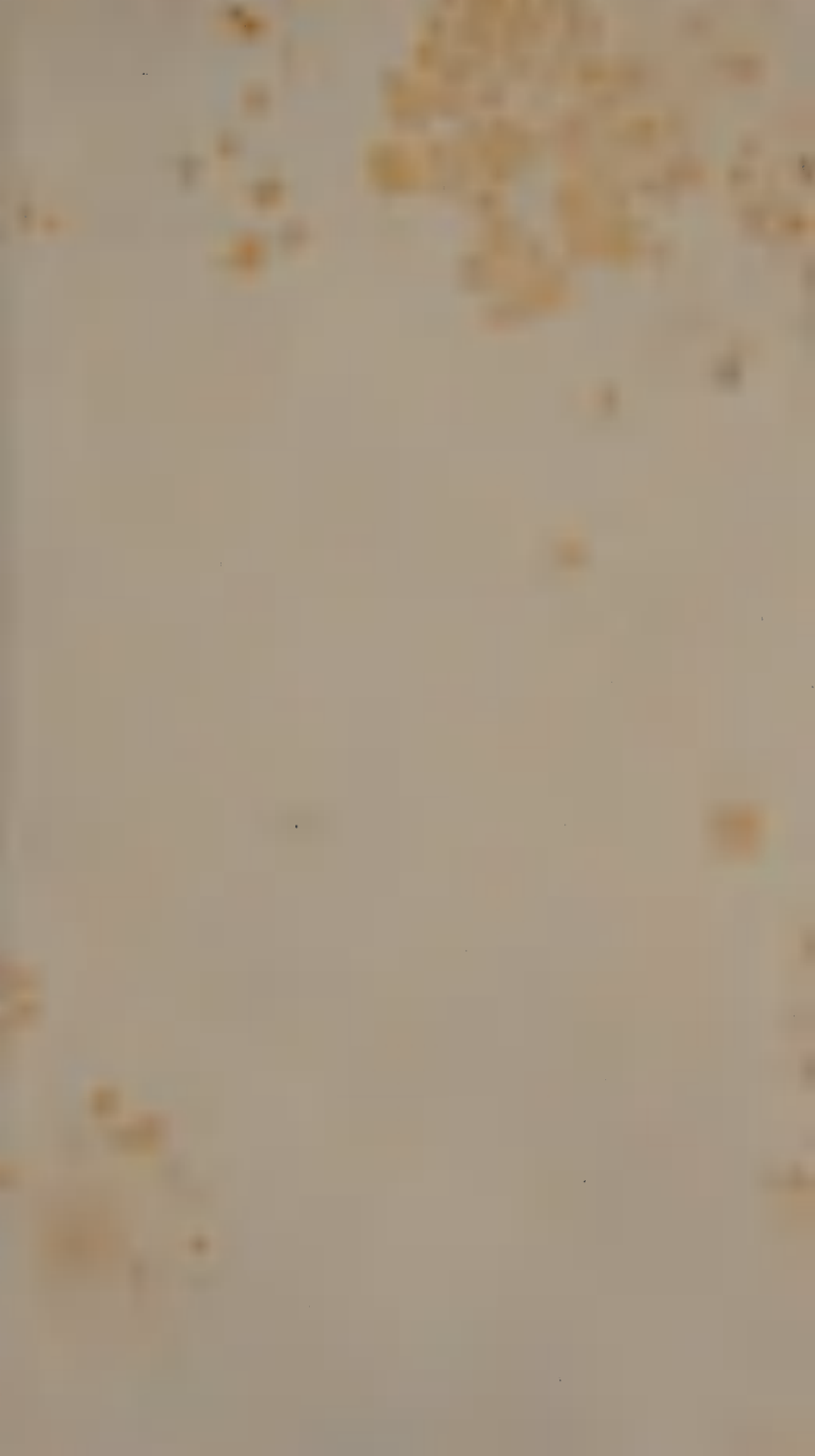
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